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ENSLAVERS OF KINGS

Enslavers of Kings

BY

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"LOVE INTRIGUES OF ROYAL COURTS," ETC.

*With Sixteen Reproductions from
Old Engravings*

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ENSLAVERS OF KINGS

CHAPTER I

A PRINCESS AND HER LOVERS

IN all the long roll of France's kings there is perhaps only one whose name has power to stir the pulses of the Frenchman of to-day : the gay and gallant Henri de Navarre, who played so romantic a part on the stage of the sixteenth century. Carrying through a hundred battles the heart of a lion, fighting his dogged way over almost insurmountable difficulties to a throne, he was for nearly twenty years the most heroic figure in Europe, inspiring his enemies with admiration and fear, and his friends with a devotion that almost reached idolatry.

And with this strain of the hero was mingled the hot blood of the Bourbons, which made his conquests in the field of love no less remarkable than his feats on the field of battle. From his boyhood to the last day on which Ravailac's dagger-thrust put a tragic end to his life, one love intrigue succeeded another, until he had counted his acknowledged mistresses to many more than

his years—from Florette, the gardener's daughter, to the high-born Henriette d'Entragues, whose "affection" he purchased at the price of a hundred thousand golden crowns, and whom Sully describes as "a minx, a vicious wasp, a shrew, an impertinent woman."

If it had been Henri's fortune to find a wife able to enchain his heart and restrain his wayward fancy, his story would no doubt have read very differently; and it was thus an unkind fate that linked his life, at the threshold of manhood, with that of Marguerite de Valois, a woman of as lax views of morality as himself, and who never professed the least affection for her gallant young husband.

It would indeed have been strange if the Valois princess had been other than she was, one of the most inconstant queens in history; for she had for father the dissolute Henri II., of whose many favourites Diane de Poitiers is the most famous, and for mother, Catherine de Medicis, one of the most infamous women who ever wore a crown, of whom Chateaubriand says, "Daughter of a family of merchants raised to the Principality of a Republic, she was accustomed to intrigues, to poisonings, to dagger-thrusts." Without heart or conscience or morals, this shameless daughter of the Medicis has come down to us through the centuries a creature of horror, branded with many



Marguerite de Valois.

a secret crime, one of which was the murder of Jeanne d'Albret (mother of Henri de Navarre), with a pair of poisoned gloves.

With such parents, and surrounded by the most depraved Court in Europe—a Court of which Queen Jeanne wrote to her son: “Great as I conceived its corruption, it exceeds the idea I had formed of it. Here the women do the love-making, and not the men”—it was almost inevitable that Marguerite, Catherine's youngest surviving daughter, should grow up to young womanhood “one of the most corrupt damsels in a thoroughly corrupt Court.” It is true that she had inherited but little of her mother's love of intrigue and cruelty—the cruelty which led her to take her young children to gloat over executions; Marguerite was not without heart, although two assassinations have been laid to her charge. She was a gay, light-hearted princess, full of impish mischief, and delighting in shocking *les convenances*. Of morals she seems to have had no conception from her earliest years.

She had, we are told, two lovers before she had passed her twelfth year; and when one of them was married, and the other sent packing from the Court, the lady transferred her affection to a third, the Prince de Martigues. Like her future husband, Henri de Navarre, she changed her lovers as lightly as she changed her dresses; always, however, cherishing a sentimental memory of them, and, it

is said, "preserving the hearts of those who were dead, in silver boxes, which she carried in the numerous pockets of her immense farthingale or crinoline around her person!"

"In each of these pockets," says Tallement des Reaux, "she used to put a box in which was the heart of one of her lovers who had died, for she was of a careful turn of mind, and as soon as they passed away, caused their hearts to be embalmed. This farthingale was hung up every night from a hook, which was fastened with a padlock behind the head of her bed."

Even Catherine de Medicis, whose cold blood did not allow laxity of morals to figure among her many vices, was both shocked and alarmed by her youngest daughter's frivolity. It was all very well for her own *demoiselles d'honneur* to practise the arts of gallantry—they were indeed methodically instructed in such arts, for they served as so many beautiful pawns in her games of political intrigue; but for her daughter it was a different and a dangerous matter, and the sooner she was safely wedded to a husband who could keep her waywardness in check, the better!

But even the finding of a husband for her own daughter, Catherine made to minister to her own designs; and when she and her son, Charles IX., arranged the nuptials of Marguerite and the young King of Navarre, the marriage was but a mask to

hide a project more diabolical than she had ever yet conceived. Henri was the recognised head of the detested Huguenots, who were a constant menace to her son's throne. His wedding would lure to Paris all his chief followers, who, their suspicions thus disarmed, would be caught in a trap, and could be annihilated to a man.

Queen Jeanne d'Albret seems to have had a presentiment of evil ; for she wrote to Henri from Paris, where she had gone to arrange the terms of the proposed marriage, " Marguerite is beautiful and well informed, and of goodly bearing, but has been nourished in the most corrupted and accursed society that ever existed ; and I would not for anything in the world have you come here to *remain* in it."

A few weeks later, on 17th August 1572, the marriage was celebrated amid scenes of unparalleled pomp and magnificence—" more " (as the princess proudly writes in her Memoirs) " than those of anyone else of my degree." But Marguerite's heart was not hers to give with her hand ; it was in the possession of the young and handsome Henri de Guise, whom she loved with all the ardour of her passionate nature ; and it was thus a very reluctant if lovely bride who stood at the altar with Henry of Navarre. So reluctant was she that, we are told, she refused point-blank to say " yes " during the ceremony ; " whereupon the fiery

Charles IX. furiously pushed down his sister's head"—an action that was taken to imply consent by the Cardinal de Bourbon, who was performing the nuptial service.

Four days later the streets of Paris were running with the blood of thousands of murdered Huguenots who had followed their champion to Paris—"drawn there for the wedding, in order that they might be butchered." Thus Catherine had the reward of her plotting; and the nuptials of her daughter were baptised in blood.

"As for me," the bride records, "I had been told nothing of all this"; and indeed her first warning of the horror that had fallen upon Paris was when one of her husband's officers, pursued by four archers, burst into her room, bleeding from two wounds in his arm, and flung himself on her bed. "I, feeling that these men had hold of me" (to quote her own words) "flung myself out on the bedside, and he after me, holding me all the time round the body. I did not know this man, and I did not know if he came there to insult me, nor if the archers were after him or me. We were both crying out, and each of us frightened of the other." Even Henry himself only escaped the general massacre of his co-religionists on condition that he professed himself a Catholic.

A union thus cradled in tragedy and treachery seemed foredoomed to unhappiness; and, indeed,

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from the first, husband and wife drifted swiftly apart, each following the path of individual pleasure. While Henri found consolation in the smiles of the beautiful Madame de Sauve, whose favours he shared with his brother-in-law, the Duc d'Alençon, and many another gallant, Marguerite had her own court of lovers, eager to worship at the shrine of her beauty, which was famous throughout Europe. Such was her loveliness, Brantôme tells us, that strangers came from all parts to look on it, and went away declaring that they had seen the most beautiful woman in the world.

Of the gallants who thus ministered to her vanity and her pleasure the list is at least as long as that of her husband's favourites. One lover succeeded another in long sequence almost to the last year of her life, when two infatuated boys, the elder barely twenty years of age, were fierce rivals for the favour of the obese and middle-aged Queen, who "wore large masses of flaxen hair, to obtain which she kept several fair-haired footmen, whose heads were shaved at stated periods."

One of these boys, infuriated by jealousy, shot his fellow-page and rival dead, by the side of the Queen's carriage; and, a few days later, walked gaily to the scaffold, while the woman for whom he had flung away his young life looked from a window on his death struggles, a smile of satisfaction on her face!

But of all these lovers of a queen two stand out with special prominence by virtue of the romance and tragedy with which their stories are invested—Joseph de Boniface, Seigneur de la Mole, and Louis de Clermont, usually known as Bussy d'Amboise. There was no handsomer or more fascinating young noble in France than de la Mole, who was not only known as the most graceful dancer at Court, but as a Prince of Lotharios, who divided his days between his amours and attendance at the Mass. When the Duc d'Alençon, whose favourite he was, once asked him why he thus fluctuated between love and piety, he laughingly explained that by his frequent devotions he was absolved from the consequences of his many sins against the moral code.

Such was the lover who took the place of Duc Henri de Guise (probably the only man she ever really loved), in the favour of Marguerite—a handsome, ingratiating, unprincipled man, who made the greatest blunder of his life when for a time he deserted his dancing and his dallying to play a part in the great plot of 1574 between the Huguenots and the Moderate Catholic (or Politique) Party. The day for the rising had been already fixed when Catherine received her first inkling of the conspiracy, and in her alarm besought her daughter Marguerite to extract all the information as to its details she possibly could, from her lover, de la Mole.

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“What,” says Colonel Haggard, “could the foolish la Mole do, when, with her glorious eyes melting into his own, the beautiful young Queen of Navarre begged him, as a proof of his love for her, to tell her all his secrets? With misplaced confidence, he poured into her ear every detail of the conspiracy. And Marguerite—what did she do? The fair traitress, after rewarding her lover with an embrace, went off to her mother—and revealed everything.” A few hours later, de la Mole and a fellow-conspirator, Coconas, were arrested and flung into prison, and, after being cruelly tortured, were condemned to death.

De la Mole took to the scaffold the light heart he had carried through life; for, as the axe was raised to sever his head from his tortured body, after commending his soul to God, he cried out gaily: “Recommend me to the good graces of the Queen of Navarre—and all the ladies.” After the execution, we read in the “Divorce Satyrique,” “the Queen of Navarre and the Duchesse de Nevers rescued the heads of their respective lovers from the poles on which they had been exposed to derision. They carried off the heads themselves, put them in their chariot, went off with them to the Chapel of St Martin, and, after bathing them with their tears, buried them themselves there with their own fair hands.”

But Marguerite soon dried her crocodile tears to

smile on the wooing of two new lovers, Messieurs Saint-Luc and Mayenne, who served to pass the time pleasantly until they were supplanted by that famous swordsman and lady-killer, Bussy d'Amboise, a man odious to Marguerite's brother the King, and especially to his chief *mignon*, Louis Béranger du Guast, an arrogant, overbearing satellite, of whom de Thon tells us, "He did not spare the first ladies of the Court, whose reputation he publicly assailed even in the presence of his Majesty; he had even the impudence to slander one illustrious princess."

As Bussy d'Amboise was in the service of her favourite brother, the Duc d'Alençon, Marguerite had abundant opportunities of meeting this *preux chevalier*. "They were continually together," she says, "and in consequence with me, my brother and I being constantly in each other's company, and he having ordered his attendants to honour and pay respect to me as much as to himself." And we may be sure it was not long before the most volatile of royal ladies lost her heart to the "bravest man in France," of whom she wrote in later years, "There did not exist at that time, of his sex and quality, anything similar in valour, reputation, grace or wit."

This liaison, however, was destined to be no less troubled and tragic than its predecessor with the ill-fated de la Mole. The King was furious at the

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new infatuation of his sister for a man who had already killed several of his beloved *mignons* in the duel ; and he required no prompting from du Guast to determine to be rid of him. Assassination was as favourite a weapon of the King as of his de Medici's mother ; and, at du Guast's suggestion, three hundred men of the Regiment des Gardes were placed in ambush to waylay and slay the too amorous seigneur.

But Henri had not counted on the prowess of his intended victim. Although d'Amboise was carrying his right arm in a sling—a pale grey scarf embroidered by Marguerite's fair hands—and was accompanied by but a handful of friends, he made so stout a fight that he not only kept the three hundred soldiers at bay, and laid low a dozen of them, but made good his escape without a scratch. “ As soon as it was daylight,” Marguerite records, “ he returned to the Louvre with as gallant and gay demeanour as if this attack upon him had been merely a little passage-at-arms arranged for his amusement.”

If the redoubtable d'Amboise could not be assassinated—indeed he seemed to bear a charmed life—he could at least be removed to a safe distance. The days of pleasant dallying with a queen were over, for a time at least ; and soon (to quote Marguerite's own words) “ Bussy took his departure, attended by the most gallant of the nobles of my

brother's retinue." A little later she herself was put under close arrest in her apartments in the Louvre with guards placed at every door.

Meanwhile her banished lover was doing doughty deeds with his sword in the war against Navarre, his courage inspired by thoughts of his imprisoned queen. On one occasion, having disarmed an adversary, he was about to despatch him, when the vanquished officer appealed for mercy in the name of his conqueror's lady-love. "Thereupon," says Brantôme, "Bussy, struck to the heart by the saying, replied, 'Go then, seek through the world the most beautiful princess and lady in the universe, throw thyself at her feet and thank her, and tell her that Bussy has spared thy life for love of her.' And this was done."

Returned from the war, Bussy still found himself an object of hatred to the King; and it was not long before further desperate attempts were made on his life, in all of which it was his would-be assassins who were worsted, while he escaped unscathed; and, after disposing of two more of Henri's *mignons* in duels, he was again banished from the Court—this time to fill the post of Governor of the Citadel of Angers.

Here, far removed from his royal mistress, he proved himself to be no *chevalier sans reproche* in the lists of love. He lost his heart to Diane, the young and beautiful wife of the Comte de

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Monsoreau, whose castle was but a few miles from Angers, and entered into an open liaison with her. When news of this amour came to the ears of the King, he realised that at last he had the long-delayed opportunity of vengeance on the man who had so long annoyed him. He advised the outraged husband of the Comtesse, who was then present at Court, to return to Angers with a body of men and slay the betrayer of his honour.

Thus, one night, when Bussy was dallying with the Comtesse in her boudoir, the door was flung open, and in poured a crowd of armed men. Bussy, though caught like a rat in a trap, determined to sell his life dearly. Quick as lightning he was on his feet with drawn sword, cutting and thrusting and parrying as his assailants attacked him, six at a time. One after another they fell before his deadly sweeps and lunges, until his sword broke at the hilt. Still undaunted, he broke off the leg of a table, and with it laid low many more before at last he fell, a sword through his heart, and bleeding from a score of wounds.

Such are a few of the many love affairs of Marguerite, Queen of France and Navarre, who, but a few days before death claimed her, one March day in 1615, was taking part in a ballet at the Louvre, and ogling the young courtiers as brazenly

as when, fifty years earlier, she ran away from her school-books to present an embroidered scarf to the Prince de Martigues, and bade him wear it at Court as her accepted lover.

CHAPTER II

AN IMPERIAL WOOPER

ABNORMAL as a man, Napoleon the First was still more abnormal as a lover. With the hot blood of Corsica in his veins, love was almost as necessary to him as the air he breathed. Had he been cast in the mould of many of the Louis', his predecessors on the throne of France, it would have been his chief and most absorbing occupation. But Napoleon had a much more serious mission in life than dancing attendance on women, however seductive; and thus passion was seldom more than a feverish incident in a strenuous career.

"He wasted little time in dalliance," as M. Masson rightly says. "His wooing was abrupt and peremptory. He has been called brutal where perhaps he might be more justly described as hurried and preoccupied. He took such distractions hastily, as he took his meals."

Even when his heart was most engaged he could brook none of the delays which woman loves to place between her lover and her surrender. Even to Madame Walewska, whom he loved more deeply and devotedly than almost any other of his mistresses, he exhibited an impatience that can

only be described as brutal. When the beautiful Pole, torn between the love of her country which inspired her sacrifice, and her passion for virtue, resisted all his advances and spurned his gifts, shrinking all the time from a surrender which she knew was inevitable, Napoleon's baffled desire at last found expression in a tempest of rage.

"You *shall*," he shouted, with flaming eyes, at one memorable interview ; "yes, I repeat it, you shall love me ! I have restored the name of your country. It owes its very existence to me ! I will do more than this for it. But look at this watch in my hand. Just as I dash it to fragments before you, so will I shatter Poland and all your hopes if you drive me to desperation by rejecting my heart, and refusing me yours."

Terrified by these threats, and the violent gesture with which he threw the watch from him, the unhappy woman sank helpless on the floor. When she recovered from her swoon the long conflict was over, and the victor was beside her, wiping away the tears that rolled slowly from her eyes.

And thus it ever was with Napoleon, with very few exceptions. He brought to his love-making the unbending will and the fierce onslaught which inspired his campaigns. Never was lover more imperious ; seldom has he been more successful. Even to Josephine he was to the last lover and not

husband. She ruled him through his senses ; she never really captured his heart. And yet, when once his conquest was assured, few men could be more tender, even more sentimental. He could, and did, “ pass from the fury of an uncontrollable passion to the most suave and delicate phases of sentimental emotion. Nothing escaped him, nothing was unknown to him in the whole range of amorous sensation ; and as far as he himself was concerned, from the personal and egotistic point of view, he was an ideal lover.”

There was, however, at least one case in which this autocratic man, with all the fierce primitive passion of Peter the Great, was as shy and awkward in his wooing as any boy couching his maiden lance in the lists of love. The story, as it has come down to us, lacks completeness ; the very name of the woman who is its heroine seems to be unknown, or at least her identity is veiled behind asterisks. But of the main facts, which were not revealed until Napoleon had long been dust, there appears to be no doubt.

When “ Madame * * * ” first appears on the scene Napoleon was within sight of his Imperial crown, the most powerful and awe-inspiring figure in Europe ; and Josephine had already worn her wedding ring for seven years. Madame * * *, at the time, was a young woman of twenty, wedded to a grave official some thirty years her senior ;

and she was incomparably the fairest of all the women who adorned the Consular Court.

Of her origin and earlier years the records tell us nothing. We know, however, that in this year of 1803 she was ravishingly beautiful—an epitome not only of all the charms, but of all womanly accomplishments. She was, we are told, a creature all grace and sweetness, with a pretty face, beautiful teeth and abundant fair hair. Her nose was aquiline, and though somewhat long, delicately arched, and full of character. Her foot was small, her hand beautifully modelled. She had, too, “a bewitching smile which, combined with the long glances of a pair of deep blue eyes, gave an expression of peculiar harmony to her face.”

Such was “Madame * * *” when Napoleon first set covetous eyes on her. Nor was such beauty by any means all her dower; for Madame had a wide range of accomplishments calculated to captivate men much less impressionable than the First Consul. She was the most graceful dancer and exquisite singer at his Court; she played the harp as no other could play it; wit and repartee came as readily to her lips as music to her dainty fingers; and she could argue as learnedly with a bishop as she could discuss statesmanship with Napoleon himself. Although, too, she had apparently been cradled in a middle-class home, she carried herself like a princess, with a grace and

dignity as impressive as her courtesy was winning, and her elegant toilettes a cause of envy to every woman at Court.

Such was this paragon of all the perfections whom, it is said, Josephine surprised in her husband's company in the orangery of St Cloud one evening in the year 1803. What love-making, if any, had preceded this disconcerting incident, appears not to be known ; but such as it may have been, it had escaped the jealous and watchful eyes of Napoleon's wife.

If, as seems improbable, this was the first meeting of the lovers, it was followed by many another hour equally stolen and no doubt equally sweet. We read of stealthy visits paid by the Consul to a small house in the Allée des Veuves which had Madame for tenant, and of still more secret visits made by Napoleon, alone and disguised, to another house which she occupied later. We learn, too, that his temper became at this time markedly more serene, and his manner more affable, a tribute no doubt to the new and happy influence that had come into his life. So assured was he of his conquest that he could even afford to smile at the rivalry of his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, who was the fair lady's shadow when the First Consul was otherwise engaged.

When the Court accompanied Napoleon to Fontainebleau to receive the Pope, who came to

grace his coronation, it was Madame * * * and not Josephine who was always by Napoleon's side, the receiver of his confidences, the object of his rare smiles ; and each day served to fan the flames of his wife's impotent jealousy. Returned to Paris, he rarely visited Josephine's apartments unless his new divinity was among the ladies in attendance, and then he seemed unable to tear himself away ; and when Josephine went to the play, her husband was to be seen in another box, making open love to her rival. To all his wife's expostulations, even to her tears, he was indifferent ; and when Madame * * * was not present, the gay face he presented to the world became gloomy, his amiability turned to sullenness or irritability, until Josephine wrote, " Scarcely a day passes without some outbreak of Napoleon, and always without the least cause. Life is not worth living under such conditions."

The autocrat of Europe was as ingenious in his devices to enjoy the company of his lady as any love-sick boy. He hated cards, but he was rarely so happy as when, under a pretence of playing whist, he could spend a delightful hour in Madame's company, while his wife, at a neighbouring table, was distracted by the sound of honeyed words and the sight of his smiles, of which her rival was the object.

But in all his wooing of Madame * * * Napoleon

was gentle, almost diffident. The man who was accustomed to ride rough-shod over the scruples of other women was as tender and chivalrous as any mediæval knight in his advances to this lady of mystery and beauty. At a great coronation fête, for instance, the Emperor (as he now had become) exchanged gracious words with every other lady guest before he made his shy way to Madame's table ; and even in her presence it was to her neighbour that he addressed his first remark, an oblique compliment to Madame, whom he saw eating olives. " I see *you* do not eat olives," he said to the lady. " You are quite right ; and doubly right not to imitate Madame * * *, for *she* is *inimitable*."

When the Empress, whose eyes had noticed the incident, summoned to her presence the lady who had abstained from the olives, and heard her story, she said venomously : " While the Emperor was advising your friend, he might have told her that it is ridiculous to attempt the part of Roxalana with a nose as long as hers."

That Josephine had excellent grounds for her jealousy and her venom, in spite of the seeming innocence of her husband's open flirtations with Madame, we know from the fact that one cold winter night at Malmaison she watched, from behind a glass door, her husband making his stealthy way along the flagged corridors to the room of her

rival. In later years she admitted that, of the two women who had shared Napoleon's affection with her, Madame * * * was the one who had caused her the most heart-pangs.

But the Empress was not long to be dispossessed of her throne ; for Napoleon's passion for her most dangerous rival had burnt itself to ashes within a year, and he was confessing his infatuation and his folly to his wife, and begging her to help him out of the entanglement ! Satiety had cured him as it always did, except with Josephine herself ; and although he remained the most loyal of friends to Madame, as she to him, until the year of his downfall, there were no more stories of secret rendezvous between them ; and all that served to recall the liaison was the child born nine months after Josephine made her surprise visit to the St Cloud orangery—a child whose advent raised no suspicion in the breast of Madame's middle-aged husband.

Napoleon, however, was never long true even to the wife who had seen so many rivals come and go, only to wrest the supremacy from each in turn ; and within two years of her dethronement Madame * * * had a successor in Eléonore Dénuelle de la Plaigne, a lady more designing and accommodating than herself, who made her appearance at Court in 1806. Eléonore, who had for father a gambler and roué, and for mother a lady who allied beauty to a disregard for morals, first appears

on the scene as pupil at the famous school at St Germain-en-Laye, which had for principal Madame Campan, formerly lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette.

The St Germain school was the most exclusive in France ; its pupils were drawn from the highest families, and included a number of new-fledged royalties—Napoleon's sister and niece, and Josephine's daughter, nieces and cousins. How Mademoiselle Eléonore came in this aristocratic "galley" it is not easy to understand ; for while she was undoubtedly of middle-class origin, her schoolfellows, with few exceptions, could boast royal or noble blood, however new the strain. That she made good use of her opportunities we shall see.

Her schooldays over, it became a matter of urgency to Eléonore's parents, deep in debt and living from hand to mouth, to find as eligible a husband as possible for their daughter, who, if she had no heritage of money or moral gifts, was at least fair to look upon, with the beauty of dark eyes, glorious black hair, a tall and graceful figure, and all the practised arts of a coquette. This husband they found in a dashing army captain, whose acquaintance they first made at the theatre ; and it was not until the honeymoon had waned that they made the discovery that their son-in-law was a scamp of "the first water," whose boasted birth

and riches were as nebulous as his morals, and who at the time of his wooing was actually living on credit at an obscure inn. A month later he was within prison walls on a charge of forgery.

Thus early had the fabric of Eléonore's ambition tumbled in the dust ! But she was no girl to sit down and weep among its ruins. In this hour of her misfortune she recalled her old schoolfellow, Caroline, the Emperor's sister, and to her she took her pitiful story, with brimming eyes, whose appeal the princess was unable to resist. A few days later she was installed in a humble place in Caroline's household and proved herself so useful and so ingratiating that, before a month had passed, she was promoted to the post of reader to her Imperial Highness.

Nothing could have been more desirable to Eléonore than this sequence of events ; for it brought her under the notice of Napoleon, whose weakness she knew as well as any lady at his Court. It was not in vain that she spread the snare of her charms before the amorous Emperor, who succumbed as readily to the flash of her dark eyes and the voluptuous appeal of her figure as if it was his first conquest. Nor was there any need of imperious wooing here ; for Eléonore was no coy damsel, with ramparts of prudery to be stormed. She was frankly proud of her quick triumph and made no demur when the Emperor invited her to

the Tuileries, where, we learn, "it soon became her habit to spend two or three hours at a time." Only one barrier remained in her path to her illicit queendom—her rascally husband ; and he must be got rid of. Divorce was an easy matter, with a husband wearing convict's uniform—he was undergoing a sentence of two years' imprisonment—and one April day, in 1806, Eléonore was a free woman, with an Emperor at her feet. Before the year was out the church register recorded the birth of "Léon, son of Eléonore Dénuelle, spinster, of independent means and of an unknown father."

Whatever might be the paternity of Madame * * * 's child, there could be no doubt of Léon's. The child was a Bonaparte to his finger-tips, Napoleon himself in miniature ; and no father ever greeted an infant more joyfully than the man to whom Léon owed his being. Here at last was proof unimpeachable that, if there was no heir to his crown, the fault was not his ; and it is claimed that it was the birth of this nameless boy that finally determined Napoleon to divorce his childless Empress and seek a new alliance which should at least make the succession sure.

Napoleon's passion for the mother appears to have died with the birth of her son, for she makes few appearances in later records, and never as mistress. He even refused to see her when she sought audience with him, at Fontainebleau, but

a few months after she became a mother ; and a pension of twenty-two thousand livres in the following year marks the close of her chapter of romance. But if Eléonore was thus relegated to obscurity, the Emperor's favour was but transferred to her child and his.

Before he had left his nursery under the roof of Madame Loir rich gifts began to pour on Léon, in addition to the provision Napoleon had made for him at birth. Now it is a present of twelve thousand livres ; now shares of the value of one hundred thousand francs ; while by a codicil to his will he leaves him a third of a million francs, with instructions that they should be spent in purchasing an estate for him. Further he adds, as proof of his solicitude for the child of the bar-sinister, " I should like the little Léon to enter the magistrature, should his inclinations lie in that direction." Much more ambitious schemes for his protégé soon entered the Emperor's head. Why should he not make him heir to his throne ? There were precedents for such a course in the history of his royal predecessors, and by this means he could avoid his contemplated divorce from Josephine, to whom he was still sincerely attached.

But this was a step which even the dictator of Europe shrank from. He dreaded the storm of disapproval which it was almost sure to evoke ; and after arming himself with precedents and

justifications he abandoned the idea — and Josephine's fate was sealed. But though he could not make his natural son an emperor, he gave him all a father's affection. "He often sent for him to the Élysée, or even the Tuileries, while he was dressing or breakfasting, and would play with him, and give him sweetmeats, amused by his lively prattle."

Léon, however, was not long destined to be a source of pleasure to his Imperial father. As a youth he won an unenviable notoriety by his loose living; he was a gambler and debauchee before he had left his 'teens behind him; and at twenty-five he had squandered his patrimony. His later life can only be explained on the ground of insanity. He made himself dreaded by his swash-buckling airs; ridiculous by his swaggering and his boastful references to the "great man to whom I owe my existence"; and he developed a mania for litigation which made him the laughing-stock of Paris. In his swollen conceit he even had the assurance to offer himself as candidate for the presidency against Prince Louis Napoleon, styling himself in his manifestos, "the Comte Léon, son of the Emperor Napoleon."

Thus he drifted through life—lawsuits and duels following each other in endless succession; embarking on wild and often fraudulent schemes to put money into his empty purse; and appealing six

times successfully to the republic to pay his mountain of debts—until, his reason completely gone, he died at Pontoise one April day in 1881, having survived his father, the Emperor, no less than sixty years.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIUMPH OF A FAVOURITE

WHEN Madame de Chateauroux died in the arms of the rival she had so cruelly wronged, Louis XV. was disconsolate. Three of the lovely de Nesle sisters had in turn ministered to his pleasure ; and when the last of them was snatched from him at the very zenith of her charms, he looked in vain for solace and a successor.

The transient amours which had once served to distract his senses no longer held any fascination for him. He was sated with fugitive pleasures which failed to satisfy the essential man in him. As for his queen, the unhappy Marie Leczinska, he had long grown weary of her long face and her nun-like asceticism. Prematurely aged and soured, she shut herself up in her apartments, leaving them only for state occasions and errands of charity. Surrounded by a dissolute and frivolous Court, she spent her days in prayers and masses and at her embroidery frame. She had even abandoned the viol and guitar which in her early days as queen had brought a little brightness into her life, and her only relaxation was to spend her evenings in the somnolent company of the

Duchesse de Luynes and a few serious-minded ladies, discussing religion and death, which always held a strange fascination for her.

From the sighs and mute reproaches of a wife with whom he had no single taste in common, Louis fled to seek distraction wherever he could find it ; but among all the fair and frail women of his Court he could find none to fill his life and banish the ennui that consumed him, like the woman who, after a few hours of terrible suffering, had been snatched from him just when she was most indispensable.

While Madame de Chateauroux was still queen-ing it at Versailles and Fontainebleau, the uncrowned Queen of France, all Paris was raving over the beauty and charms of a young bride who was taking all hearts by storm. Never, if reports were to be credited, had such a paragon of all female perfections been seen. She had, de Goncourt tells us, magnificent hair, ravishing teeth and the most delicious smile, which stamped upon her cheeks two bewitching dimples. Her figure, rounded but not large, curved admirably ; her perfect hands, the play of gesture from all her vivacious, passionate body, and above all, a mobile, varying physiognomy, marvellously animated, which displayed in turn a moved or imperious tenderness, noble seriousness or wanton graces.

And these physical attractions, rare as they

were, were but a small part of the fascinations of this incomparable woman who dazzled the eyes and senses of Paris. She was gifted with a voice of such purity and sweetness as would alone have made her a queen ; she played the clavicorde as none other could play it ; her dancing was the very poetry of motion ; she was, by common consent, the most graceful and skilful rider in all Paris ; she had a brilliant wit, and gifts of acting which would have made her fortune on the stage ; and she had, moreover, a genius for dress which no other woman could even approach.

Such—and the description appears not to have erred on the side of extravagance—was Madame d'Étioles, when as a bride she took Paris by storm in the year 1741. Of her earlier history there were jealous tongues only too ready to tell the tale. Before her fortunate marriage she was known to a different world as Mademoiselle Poisson, who had for father a minor official of the Commissariat, whose speculations had ended in dismissal and disgrace. Her mother's repute was even worse ; for Madame Poisson, taking advantage of her husband's enforced absence, had, for some time before her daughter's birth, been playing the rôle of mistress to M. de Tournehem, a wealthy contractor, who, perhaps not unnaturally, made himself responsible for the education of Mademoiselle when she came on the scene.

Thus it was that the reputed daughter of the disgraced Poisson was taught singing by Jeliette and dancing by Guibaudet, and that a small fortune was lavished on equipping her with all the accomplishments with which she was later to dazzle the world. And when M. d'Étioles, the complaisant contractor's nephew, appeared among Mademoiselle's many lovers, it was M. de Tournehem who arranged the match for his nephew and gave the bride half his fortune as dower.

That Mademoiselle's wishes were not consulted did not trouble her in the least. The husband Fate had assigned to her was short and fat and ugly, a bourgeois to his finger-tips. He was, and she made no secret of it, repulsive to her ; but he would serve her purpose as well as any other. He would provide her with the luxuries she loved, and with gold to deck her beauty for the conquest which was the one ambition of her life.

Years earlier, when she was a child of nine, a fortune-teller had told Madame Poisson that her daughter would one day be the mistress of Louis XV. ; and the mother had never for a moment lost sight of this brilliant prospect. With this object her daughter was trained ; the duty and the splendour of it was instilled into her until it became an absorbing dream ; and when M. d'Étioles offered her his hand, she accepted it, as she would

have accepted any other hand which brought such a dowry to carry her towards her goal.

But between the bourgeois world of Paris and the august person of the King there was a great gulf to be bridged. If she could not win the entrée to the Court, there was at least no difficulty in letting the King see her. He would be no man if he could resist the appeal of a beauty which made so quick a conquest of other men. Thus it was that when Louis went hunting in the forest of Sénart, Madame was there in her most ravishing costume, promenading under his very eyes, fluttering her fan and practising all her coqueties. "She passes and repasses in the midst of the horses, dogs and royal escort, like some light and alluring Diana, now clad in azure, in a rose-coloured phaeton; now in an azure-coloured phaeton, clad in rose. The King looked at her, remarked her, and took a pleasure in the handsome equipage which set the Court a-talking."

But there were jealous eyes watching the artifices of the seductive stranger. Madame de Chateauroux was ever by Louis' side to keep all would-be rivals at bay; and Madame d'Étioles was soon given to understand that her presence at the Royal Hunt was not desirable. But Madame merely smiled at the rebuff. She could afford to wait. And the forest of Sénart saw her rainbow phaetons and costumes no more, until the Duchesse

was no longer there to cast baleful eyes on her.

Then at last her opportunity came ; and she was quick to take advantage of it. At a great masked ball in the Hotel de Ville, Louis was attracted by a charming mask, “ who tormented him by a thousand provocations, a thousand pretty sayings. At the King’s entreaty the domino consented to unmask, and the handkerchief which Madame d’Étioles dropped, as though by accident, was picked up by Louis, to the accompaniment of a murmur amongst the company, ‘ The handkerchief has been thrown.’ ”

But still, although Louis’ curiosity was piqued by the reappearance of the fair stranger of the forest his heart appears to have been untouched. Some days after this adventure he was confiding to his valet, Benet, his disgust with the fugitive amours which were now his only distraction—with such lights o’ love as the Duchesse de Rochecouart, and Madame de Popelinière—and was bemoaning the fate which had removed his beloved Chateauroux. “ Ah, Sire,” said Benet, “ you need no longer bemoan the Duchesse’s loss. I know a lady who can be all, and more to your Majesty than ever she was ; a lady of still greater beauty, who, moreover, has been your Majesty’s mute worshipper from childhood.” Then he reminded Louis of the lovely stranger of the forest and the masked

ball, and spoke so glowingly of her charms and her gifts that the King authorised him to make an appointment with her.

Of this first momentous meeting of the King and Madame d'Étioles, history tells us nothing. Its effects, however, were immediate. The Dauphin was in arms at once and showed his displeasure by forbidding the Dauphine to appear any longer in the private apartments. It was one thing to make a mistress of a lady of birth like the Duchesse de Chateauroux, but this dallying with a "tradesman's" daughter of discreditable antecedents was an outrage. Louis, however, only smiled at his son's disapproval, little realising that it was but the first rumbling of a storm of resentment that was soon to break ; and within a month Madame d'Étioles was supping in his private apartments, as a prelude to spending the night as his guest.

When morning came Madame professed to be horrified at the prospect of returning to her husband, who, she declared, was roused to such a fury of jealousy that her life was not safe ; and she implored the King to shield her—to allow her to remain *perdue* for a time at the palace. Then it was that she coaxed from Louis, by caresses and tears, a promise to give her a lodging near him, to acknowledge her as his mistress, and to banish her husband. Thus at last, by her patience and coquetries, Madame d'Étioles arrived at the goal

of her ambition, and realised the fortune-teller's prediction that she would become the mistress of Louis XV.

Thus established at Court, Madame's conquest over the King was assured. He was intoxicated by her beauty, fascinated by her gifts and graces. Even Madame de Chateauroux was forgotten in the ardour of the new passion that possessed him. When he was called away to war, we are told, he wrote eighty love letters to her in the space of two months ; and, immediately on his return, she was formally installed as *maitresse en titre* in the presence of his Court, with the Princesse de Conti for chaperon. So cleverly had she used her opportunities during Louis' absence that she had won the favour of his prudish queen ; and while the Dauphin was scowling at the interloping bourgeoisie his royal mother was smiling her sweetest on her husband's new mistress.

But while the King was her veriest slave, and while she basked in the Queen's smiles, she was quick to realise that she was surrounded by enemies determined to dethrone the "Grisette," the "Petite Bourgeoise" (for by such contemptuous names they called her) who had dared to aspire to a king. Every movement was watched by jealous eyes ; every word she uttered was listened to by jealous ears, and turned to ridicule. This parvenue might queen it in middle-class drawing-



Madame de Pompadour:

rooms, but in a Royal Court she was as much out of her natural element as a fish out of water ; and her constant breaches of etiquette furnished delicious food for the scoffers, who did not scruple to mimic her to her face. When, however, they sought to draw the King into their amusement, his only answer was, " It is an education which it will amuse me to complete."

Although Madame could afford to smile at such impotent jealousies, she saw clearly the menace of some of the enmities she had innocently aroused. Madame de Lauraguais, whom she had supplanted in the King's favour, was a dangerous enemy indeed, with her witty tongue, her genius for mimicry and her army of friends at Court. Even more dangerous was Maurepas, Louis' great minister, who threw the Court into convulsions by caricaturing her airs, her walk, her speech, until the King himself could not restrain his laughter. And Richelieu, who had been in the habit of choosing Louis' mistresses, made so little concealment of his ill-will that even at the royal supper-table he missed no opportunity of mimicking and insulting her.

And where the great ones of the Court led the way, the populace was quick to follow. Paris was flooded with songs and *Poissonades*, full of indecencies and scandalous references to the birth and early history of the new favourite. Never

was a king's mistress faced by such a tempest of obloquy and hatred. But Madame, the Marquise de Pompadour (as she had thus early become), was no woman to bow before any tempest. She had a courage to match her charms ; and she bravely set herself to defy and subdue the storm that raged round her head.

By adroit diplomacy she won one champion to her side after another. The Prince de Conti she won by promises to arrange a marriage between his son and Madame Adelaide ; she made stalwart supporters of the brothers Paris, the Noailles and other great financiers who supplied the gold for Louis' wars, and were the money kings of France. Among the ministers she drew to her side the Marquis de Puysieux and the Duc de Saint Severin ; and she brought her charms so effectually to bear on Richelieu himself that, from being her most malevolent enemy, he became one of her staunchest allies.

Thus by smiles and bribes and clever diplomacy the Marquise gradually surrounded herself with a small army of friends strong enough to protect her against the enmities and jealousies of the Court, until, with the King at her feet, she could afford to smile at them. Her position at least was secure ; it only remained to get Louis himself still deeper into her toils ; and this, for a woman of such fascinations and such consummate cleverness,

was no difficult task. It was imperative, if she was to retain her hold on him, that she should never allow ennui to come near him. Ennui was the bane of Louis' life, which pursued him to his last day ; and " she had the genius, the patience and the wit to caress, alleviate and amuse his malady."

She assumed complete control of his life, deprived every hour of its monotony, left him no moment which she did not fill with entertainment and pleasure. Even when he was interviewing ministers and ambassadors she sat by his side, and at the first yawn brought the interview to an abrupt conclusion. She sang to him, played to him, kept him in a ripple of laughter with her droll stories and mimicries, provided him with a constant succession of diversions ; and, when these failed, kept him in a hurricane of movement from one place to another, which left no moment to relapse into his normal gloom. Louis was enraptured with his wonderful new plaything. He had never enjoyed life so much, even in the palmiest days of Vintimille and Chateauroux.

And still Madame de Pompadour's resources were by no means exhausted. There was, for instance, the theatre, where her gifts reached their splendid climax. Louis had not seen her act. He must provide a stage for her, and she would reveal a new world to him. The King was like a

child with a new toy. He spent weeks of feverish delight in planning the "Théâtre des Petits Cabinets" in his private apartments, and watching it grow into splendid existence, with all its marvels of decoration and costumes—"silk stockings that cost fifteen livres, 222 costumes for men, 153 costumes for women, and brocades, tissues, embroideries, braids and tassels of gold and silver."

Never was theatre more gorgeously equipped; and never did high-placed personages so scramble for the honour of playing the meanest part. The Marquise had at last come to her true queendom; for she was supreme among actresses as she was the fairest among fair women. "In comedy she found a field for her vivacity, her subtlety, the art of diction and the spirit of breeding. In opera she revealed all the caresses and enchantments of her voice. A singer and a comédienne, a Grace with two faces, it seemed as though two muses had been sponsors to the cradle of this spoilt child of the eighteenth century; the Muse of Song, the Muse of Smiles."

These were beyond question Madame de Pompadour's happiest years, when, day after day, she was bewitching not only the King her lover, but her very enemies in his Court, by her grace and beauty and the magic of her acting. Now, de Goncourt tells us, she appeared as a peasant in a skirt of blue taffetas round which fluttered flimsies

of gauze ; now as a prince of Greece in armour of puffed golden gauze, adorned with waving plumes. Now, in some Eastern rôle, she wore “ a dolman of cherry-coloured satin, bordered with ermine, with a petticoat of blue satin embroidered in gold ; or a petticoat of rose taffetas set about with silver, the drapery and mantle stamped with silver and vari-coloured flowers ” ; again she was Galatea in a naiad’s dress, Venus in a costume of silver and blue, “ sweeping with the majesty of a royal mantle a huge train of blue with a mosaic of silver.” And in every character, peasant or naiad, Venus or Herminia, she was equally ravishing, dazzling all eyes and charming all senses.

As for Louis, he was in the seventh heaven of delight at this triumph of his low-born favourite, who had thus won sovereignty for herself against the enmity of his Court. She was born to be a queen in spite of the obscurity and shame of her cradling, and a queen she should be. She was installed in the royal apartment of the Montespan at Versailles ; while she was seated, the greatest courtiers must stand ; her equipages bore the velvet cap and ducal mantle on their shield of arms ; and a duc was proud to bear her train. Her retinue was more costly and splendid than that of the Queen herself ; and with the gold her infatuated lover provided, she purchased estate after estate, until she was the richest woman in all France.

Castles and palaces and far-spreading lands were hers, from the Evreux mansion in the Champs Élysées, for which she paid five hundred thousand livres, to vast domains at Crécy, D'Aubney and Saint Rémy. On Crécy and D'Aubney alone she squandered four million livres, and into Bellevue she poured two and a half million livres of Louis' gold. Thirty-six million livres were spent in investing her palaces and estates with every luxury and enrichment of art which money could purchase.

Thus triumphantly did the "Grisette," the "tradesman's daughter," reach the pinnacle of splendour and power which was to be hers until that last hour, in 1764, when, with her dying breath, she said to the curé who was leaving her room, "One moment, Monsieur le Curé, we will go together." Thus, holding her sceptre until it fell from her lifeless hands, died the most amazing woman who has ever held a king in thrall by the magic of her charms.

And, the irony of it all ! Before Madame de Pompadour's body was cold, Louis' queen was writing to the President Henault : "However, there is no more question here of *that which is no more* than if she had never existed. Such is the world ! "

CHAPTER IV

A MAGDALENE OF THE 18TH CENTURY

“ AH, les beaux jours ! Ah, les beaux jours ! ” whispered Sophie Arnould as she lay dying, old and destitute and shorn of the last vestige of the beauty that had for so long held Paris in thrall ; and the vision of those golden days of her triumph transfigured for one last moment the face on which sorrow and suffering had laid defacing hands.

More than sixty years earlier the woman who had been the scandal and delight of her age was cradled on St Valentine’s Day, a fitting birthday for one who was to live for Love ; and at the baptismal font she had been named Magdalene (Sophie) in unconscious prevision of the rôle she was destined to play in life. There was nothing in her ancestry to mark her out for such a romantic, splendid and shameless career as was hers. Her father was a retired tradesman, staid and unsentimental to the last degree, proud of his business success and the small fortune it had brought. Her mother was a tradesman’s daughter from Blois, whose mind ran to social ambition and the cultivation of men of letters.

She loved to draw to her bourgeois salon the intellectuals of her time; to sit, a humble worshipper, at the feet of Voltaire, and to bask in the wit of d'Alembert, Diderot and Fontenelle as they feasted and made merry at her hospitable table. The child of such respectable, commonplace parents should have been a model of all the proprieties, with no ambition other than to follow in their staid footsteps.

But capricious Fate had other and very different designs for her. Before she had emerged from the nursery it was clear to all that Sophie was no ordinary child and that she promised to become an extraordinary woman. She seems to have been a prodigy almost from her cradle. At four, we are told, she was able to read the most difficult books, and amazed all by her wit and intelligence. At seven she was an expert musician, with the voice of a nightingale. She was, too, bewilderingly pretty, with a winsomeness that made everyone her slave. "Madame," said Voltaire one day to Madame Arnould, delighted by the witty repartees of the seven-year-old Sophie, "I foresee that this little lady will be a very remarkable woman." "I hope, Monsieur," Madame answered, "she will be a *good* one; that will please me better."

When the Princesse de Conti called one day, drawn by curiosity to see this wonder-child, she was so fascinated by Sophie's prettiness and clever



Sophie Arnould.

tongue that she exclaimed in delight: "What a perfect darling! *Do* let me have her, madame! I will take the greatest care of her." The tradesman's wife, flattered by such an offer from a royal lady, consented; and Sophie found herself transported to an exalted sphere, in which she became the pet and plaything of the greatest in the land. Her education was entrusted to the most eminent professors in Paris; and, under Mademoiselle Fel's skilful teaching, her voice developed such a rare quality that soon all Paris was talking of the "little girl with the voice of an angel."

Thus the happy years passed for the spoiled child of Fortune, until, when she had barely passed her sixteenth birthday, her opportunity came, and with it a complete revolution in her life. The vocalist who was to sing *Tenebrae* at a great festival at the Convent of Panthémont failed to appear. The abbess was in despair, as there was no time to procure a substitute. Then, in a moment of inspiration, the Princesse de Conti had a happy idea. Why should not her protégée take the missing singer's place? The abbess was doubtful; the girl was too young to undertake such a task. But at least she was better than no one. And a few minutes later the beautiful voice was flooding the church with a sweetness and poignancy that sent a thrill through every worshipper and brought tears to many eyes. Sophie's triumph was complete.

On Good Friday "more than two hundred carriages had to be turned away from the Convent Church." All Paris was flocking to hear the "Angel with the Celestial voice."

The news of this wonderful singer was quick to reach the Court ; Marie Leczinska, Louis' neglected queen, was full of curiosity to see and hear the girl whose voice had such a magic in it to melt hearts. The Princesse must bring her protégée to Court ; and soon Sophie's voice was casting its spell over the Queen of France, who was exclaiming enthusiastically to the Princesse : " I want her. You really must let me have her." The following day another summons came from Versailles. This time it was Madame de Pompadour, the King's mistress, who wanted to hear the prodigy. Again the journey was made, and again the golden voice rang out in the royal palace, while the Pompadour listened enraptured, tears brimming in her eyes.

A few days later Sophie received two letters : one appointing her singer to the Queen, the second appointing her to the King's music, and particularly to his theatre of the opera. Here indeed was a dilemma. How was she to choose between the Queen and the King ? To offend the latter was to offend the Pompadour, who was more powerful than either King or Queen, and of the two courses Sophie, advised by the Princesse, chose the safer ; in spite of her mother's tears and pleadings that she would

not go on the stage. In vain Madame Arnould besought one abbess after another to give sanctuary to her daughter, to rescue her from such a terrible fate. None of them all dared to offend the King—and his uncrowned queen ; and one December day in 1757 Sophie made her *début* on the stage of the opera amid a tumult of applause led by Louis and the Pompadour. A moment later a hush of enchantment fell on the audience, as the first words, so singularly appropriate, fell on the ear, in notes pure and sweet as the song of the nightingale, “*Charmant amour, ça porte bonheur.*”

The hour of triumph had come for the tradesman’s daughter. The whole world of Paris was at her feet, entranced by the charm of her beauty and the glory of her voice with its blending of sweetness and poignancy. Her beauty was now in its first fragrant bloom. Her face of a perfect oval was illuminated by a pair of glorious eyes—flashing with flame, dancing with mischief and laughter, or melting into a tender wistfulness as mood succeeded mood. Eyelids exquisitely narrowed at the corners, eyebrows sweeping like the wings of a distant bird, a nose daintily modelled, the scarlet of sweetly curved lips, and a crown of luxuriant hair, black as night, complete the face as we see it pictured by La Tour. Her figure was slight, with grace in every line and poetry in every movement ; while she herself said, “ I have a well-made leg, a pretty

foot, and arms and hands good enough for a painter's model."

But even such charms as these had to yield place to that wonderful voice, which had in it "cries and tears and sighs and sad caresses ; she could make her audience shiver. It was the voice of Psyche in Hades, of Agamemnon's daughter searching for the lost Achilles ; of Iphigenia dragged to the altar."

Seldom has woman been so seductively dowered for the conquest of man. Seldom has she so frankly made this conquest the great object of her life. As a child she startled Fontenelle one day by saying, "Love is the only thing worth living for. Don't you think so, Monsieur ?" And almost before she emerged from short frocks she had at least one lover, in Malezieux, a notorious dandy and rake, who was the infatuated slave of the school-girl, writing sonnets to her *beaux yeux* and following her like a shadow.

But while Paris was at the feet of his brilliant daughter Monsieur Arnould was drifting into evil days. His small fortune was lost in speculation ; bankruptcy followed ; and he found himself compelled to earn a modest livelihood by taking lodgers at "thirty sous a night." One day there came to the Arnould *pension* a young man from the country who brought to Paris a play for acceptance. That he was no down-at-heels author was clear from the richness of his dress ; while his aristocratic bearing

proclaimed that he was of no obscure birth. The handsome young author was quick to ingratiate himself into the favour of his host and hostess, who were flattered by his deference and charmed by his conversation. To their beautiful daughter, with whose fame Paris was ringing, he appeared to pay small attention.

Thus a few weeks passed pleasantly. Then one morning Madame Arnould awoke to the discovery that her pretty bird had flown—and the good-looking stranger also. A few hours later a lackey in gorgeous livery appeared, bearing a note signed Louis, Comte de Brancas: “Madame, I am ashamed to inform you that I have repaid your amiable hospitality by running away with your daughter. . . . I am, alas, a married man, but as soon as I am a widower, I promise you solemnly that I will marry her.”

What could Madame do? Tears and pleadings were alike useless to recall a step so fatal to her daughter’s fair fame. She had been shamefully deceived by the unprincipled Comte, who masqueraded as an author to steal her treasure from her. But after all he *was* a Comte, and would some day be Duc de Lauragais on his father’s death; and he had promised marriage—all the reparation he could now make. So, drying her eyes, she sought the runaways, took them to her arms and gave them a tearful blessing.

“Monsieur de Lauraguais,” Sophie used to say in later years, “has given me two million kisses, but he has made me shed two million tears.” The life that followed that midnight elopement was a sandwich of heaven and—the other place, love-making alternating with jealousies and quarrels, until at last Sophie, wearied of it all, one day packed up her lover’s presents and sent them in a carriage, with their two children, to the Duc’s wife, who promptly sent them back again, retaining the children.

But, if the ducal playwright had his *congé*, Sophie had no lack of successors. Monsieur Bertin, a wealthy roué, was quick to step into Lauraguais’ shoes. He lavished fortunes on his mistress; and his reward was that he in turn had to give place to a successor—this time none other than Sophie’s hairdresser, one Lacroix, with whom, we are told, “she used to walk about on Sundays, like a little milliner, radiant and elated.” Duc, Cræsus, hairdresser! Thus the lovers followed one another in incongruous succession. And while the actress was dallying with the hairdresser, his two rivals were fighting a duel over the woman who was weary of both.

Lacroix, however, *ami de cœur* though he was, had no long supremacy, for within a few weeks we find him sharing his lady’s favours with Prince d’Hénin, prince and hairdresser vying with each

other as to who should run errands for their joint mistress ! But both d'Hénin and Lacroix soon proved far too dull lovers for Sophie, who had a very sprightly wit of her own and demanded wit in her slaves ; and it was not long before de Lauraguais, whose clever tongue at least kept her amused, was restored to full favour.

Of Sophie Arnould's gift of epigram and repartee many brilliant examples have come down to us, which enable us to understand that, while the men idolised her she could be a terror to her own sex. Of Mademoiselle Guimard, the most graceful dancer of her time, and also the thinnest, she once said, " I never see her dancing a *pas de trois* with the men without being reminded of two dogs fighting for a bone." And when a lady of uncertain age remarked, " What a dreadful thing it is to be approaching forty," she retorted, " Yes ; but that need not trouble *you*, for every day is taking you farther from it."

One day a lady of the Court exclaimed in her hearing, " What a pity it is that there is not some badge which decent women could wear to distinguish them from the ' creatures,' " with a scornful glance towards the actress. " Ah, Madame," came the swift answer from Sophie, " you should not wish that ; for *then* the ' creatures ' would be able to count you." " What are you doing ? " she asked once of Bernard, the poet, whom she found lying

under a tree. "I am talking to myself," lazily answered the poet. "Take care then," said Sophie, with a laugh, "for you are talking to a flatterer!"

Very crushing was her retort to Mademoiselle Heinal, a lady who was her rival in the affection of the Duc de Lauraguais, when she complained that some person had spoken of her as a *catin*. "Ah!" said Sophie in accents of sympathy, "people are so rude nowadays; they call things by their right names." But perhaps the most effective of her many retorts was that administered to a police official, Monsieur Sartines, who was sent to examine her on the subject of a supper, at which she had been present, when scandalous stories were told of the Pompadour. To all his inquiries Sophie gave evasive answers; she professed not to be able to remember. At last the baffled official broke out angrily, "It seems to me that a woman like you would probably remember things of that sort." "Yes," answered Madame, with her sweetest smile; "but, before a man like you I am not a woman like me."

For more than twenty years Sophie was the idol of Paris, absolute Queen of the Opera as of the hearts of men. Her days were crowded with gaiety and the homage of all the greatest in France. One triumph succeeded another, until it seemed that the *beaux jours* of her reign would never come

to an end. Each character she assumed in opera was declared more brilliant than its predecessors ; Rameau and Gluck and all the great composers of her day were among her most ardent worshippers ; her legion of lovers surrounded her with luxuries a queen might have envied.

Never did woman drink more deeply or with a keener zest of the cup of pleasure, or was more disdainful of its dregs. When she was within sight of her fortieth year she seemed but at the zenith of her career, with many long years of queendom before her. But the end was near, and it came with dramatic suddenness. Her too-caustic tongue had made an enemy of Gluck at last ; and when *Alceste* was produced in 1778 the principal part was given, not to her, but to her rival, Rosalie Levasseur. Her sceptre was taken from her ; and her dethronement was swift to follow.

The fickle populace, whose idol she had so long been, began to look coldly on her. Their cheers gave place to silence, and then to ominous signs of disapproval. The climax was reached one night when she was singing in the opera *Euthyme et Lyris*, when the line, “ Vous brulez que je sois partie,” was greeted with peals of laughter and volleys of ironical cheers.

Her career, she knew, was ended ; and she took her dismissal with a smile on her face, whatever bitterness was in her heart. She was still young and

beautiful, and she could still be a queen—in other spheres. But a short time before the curtain was thus brutally rung down on her stage career she had given orders for the erection of a magnificent house in the *Chaussée d'Antin*, which was to excel in splendour any in Paris. The plans were prepared by the famous architect, Belanger, her favourite of the hour, and building was about to begin. But the walls of this wonder-palace were never to rise ; the plans alone, which are to be seen to-day in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, survive to suggest its magnificence.

For a brief time she found a solace in her salon and the society of the great ones who flocked to it—among them Voltaire, who had nursed her a generation earlier, and at eighty-four was her chief “courtier.” “I am eighty-four,” the old man said one day to his hostess, “and I have done eighty-four foolish things.” “Dear me !” she cried, “I am not yet forty, and I have done more than a thousand.”

But the chapter of her follies and her splendours was now closed. The rest of her life's journey was to be downhill. Riches were to give place to poverty, and poverty to destitution. When she could no longer afford to live in her beloved Paris she found a modest refuge at Clichy ; and from Clichy she drifted to an old and dismantled priory at Luzarches, over whose doorway she had the words, “*Ite, missa*

est " inscribed in ironical reminder that her own dismissal had come.

Here she spent twenty years of pathetic loneliness, dead to the world, without friend or anyone to minister to her wants. " She planted cabbages and cooked them for her dinner ; she kept cocks and hens, turkeys, pigs, rabbits, and pigeons, until these last proved too expensive to feed." And yet through all her loneliness and poverty she maintained the bright spirit that had carried her so brilliantly through her years of splendour. " I have not one moment's *ennui*," she wrote to Belanger. " Nor do I think I shall know one until the end comes."

The end, however, was slow to come, and the last nine years of her life were of a nature to crush the most buoyant spirit. To all those who had fawned on and idolised her in the days of her queendom she was as dead as if the earth had closed over her—to all except her old lovers, Belanger, the architect, and Lauraguais, the ducal playwright of the Arnould *pension*. Both remained loyal to her to the last, as she to them ; and to both she wrote frequent letters, with a pathetic note of gaiety and much of her old-time brilliance of wit. " How sad it is to grow old," she wrote in one letter to Belanger, whom she addresses " My good Angel " ; " but never mind," she continues. " At the end of the ditch, the fall."

Lauraguais, now despoiled of his riches by the Revolution, and almost as destitute as herself, invited her in 1791 to come and share his poor home ; but Sophie was too proud to accept the charity even of such an old friend. She begged him instead to come to her. “ You will have to do without much attendance,” she wrote ; “ but I will do everything you want.” But Lauraguais declined her offer as she had declined his, although he paid her visits from time to time to talk over the days when life was young and Fortune was kind.

Over the sad remnant of Sophie Arnould’s days it is well to draw the curtain of silence. They were days of terrible privation, with an empty cupboard and a fireless grate. Then illness came ; and then the merciful end of it all. When she saw the priest bending over her, pitifully watching her life ebb away, she gave him one glance of gratitude and whispered, “ *Quia multum amavit* ”—“ because she loved much.” And then with her last breath, “ Ah, les beaux jours ! ” as the spirit of the Magdalene went to meet its Judge.

CHAPTER V

THE INFATUATION OF A KING

WITH a few notable exceptions the kings of England have set an example of clean and seemly living which is in gratifying contrast to the lives of their brother-sovereigns on the Continent. With the solitary exceptions of the "Merrie Monarch" and the fourth George, their love affairs play but an inconspicuous part in their chronicles, and they have been conducted with a decorum which has removed at least some of their reproach. Even George I., one of the most amorous of our rulers, was content to confine his favours to two women, the Duchess of Kendal and my Lady Darlington, with a constancy, in the case of the former at least, which has scarcely a parallel in the annals of illicit love. Our royal records contain few such scandalous stories as mar the records of almost every royal line in Europe.

But although our kings have thus presented a fairly decent front to the world, few if any of them have escaped altogether the seductions of fair women. Even George III., that model of all the virtues and proprieties, lived to regret his boyish dallying with Hannah Lightfoot, the pretty

Quakeress, who, beyond a doubt, became the mother of more than one of his children ; and James I., that " most tender and loving, nursing father " of the Church, was, if we are to believe contemporary chronicles, not as free from this frailty of the flesh as such a " sanctified person " should have been.

Of all our rulers, perhaps, one would look to Edward III. for an absolutely clean moral sheet ; but here again disillusion awaits the searcher. In the early days of his kingship this most austere and ascetic of our kings was, it is said, " overmuch given to loving where he was not wed " ; and the secret records reveal more than one entanglement which is not to his credit. There are some who read into the story of the " Garter " evidence of one such liaison ; but although we may say with him, in relation to this incident, " Evil to him who evil thinks," there is small doubt that his daughter Isabel, who gave her Spanish husband the title to quarter the Royal Leopards on his shield, had no sanction of the wedding ring to support her entry into the world.

But these were the indiscretions of hot-blooded youth, of which kings have no monopoly. With his wedding to his queen, Philippa of Hainault, came long years of nuptial loyalty. Happy in the love of a good woman, Edward proved himself as unassailable by the battery of female blandishments

as he was invincible in war. The hero of Crécy and Poitiers had now a more serious work in life than sitting at the feet of beauty ; and when years and the hardships of campaigns had cooled the fever of his blood, the life of continence, which had become a habit, seemed inevitable to him.

And so it would probably have been to the end had not Alice Perrers crossed his path, when he was already well advanced in middle age ; and the man who for a generation had been true to his queen succumbed at last to the charms of a woman who had neither birth nor beauty to recommend her to his favour. Where this "vulgar siren" sprang from, or how she came under the eyes of the King no research can discover. Some assign her for father an Essex tiler ; others declare that she was daughter of a Devonshire weaver, and that her earliest known love affair was with a semi-imbecile water-carrier. There seems little doubt indeed that Alice Perrers was "a child of the gutter," as base born as Martha, the Livonian scullerymaid, who won the heart of Peter the Great, and with it the crown of Empress, or as the pretty flower-seller of the Bergen market who enslaved Christian, King of Denmark.

Attempts have been made to provide her at least with gentle birth, for there were Perrers of social standing in her time. There was a Norfolk squire of the name who had for wife a daughter of Sir

Thomas Ormsby ; and there was a Sir Richard Perrers, who rode to Westminster as Knight of the Shire for Hertford and lived to be an outlaw. She may have had either of these respectable Perrers for father, say those who object to the weaver and tiler parentage ; but no scrap of evidence supports such pretensions.

That Alice was of low origin all we learn of her goes to prove. She was coarse-featured and coarse-mannered, with no trace of breeding in mind or body. She had the toil-hardened hands and red arms of Martha, the scullerymaid ; and such charms as she could lay claim to for the conquest of man were an opulent bust, red ripe lips, bold eyes, an abounding vitality and an unfailing flow of animal spirits. Such was the coarse battery she brought to bear on the King who had for so long successfully resisted the allurements of the most beautiful and gently bred women of his Court.

How Alice Perrers ever found her way to the circle of the Court must ever remain a mystery. That she had bridged the gulf which separates the hovel from the palace by the year 1366 we know ; for she figures in the records of that year as receiving two tuns of wine from the royal cellars, a strange present for any young woman ; and she was picking and choosing her presents from the royal wardrobe—rich gowns of silk and furs of ermine and miniver.

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She was already installed in high favour with Edward ; and the tongues of the Court ladies were gossiping of secret meetings between the King and the buxom young woman who had found her way so mysteriously to the Court.

What Queen Philippa thought of this strange defection of her husband after so many years of unswerving devotion to herself, no records tell us. That she must have known of the vulgar liaison is reasonably certain ; for, however secretly it was conducted, before long not only London, but every remote town and village in England was talking in indignation or amusement of the King's folly. But Philippa was not long left to mourn her husband's disloyalty ; for within three years of her supplanter's coming her death left the field clear for the low-born rival.

There was now no obstacle to Edward's open recognition of his favourite, whose hour of triumph had arrived. She was the acknowledged mistress of the King and meant to take full advantage of her position. Before the late Queen was well underground Alice made claim to her jewels to deck her opulent charms ; but for once she found her lover anything but complaisant. Edward point-blank refused a request which did dishonour to his dead wife, and consigned the jewels to safe custody ; and it was not until he had been four years a widower that she was able to array herself in the

gems which Philippa had worn with such queenly dignity.

Other gifts, however, were hers in plenty. Edward lavished on her jewels and costly gowns ; he looked on without a word of protest while she stripped his palace of its choicest treasures for the adorning of her apartments or her person. And still her greed was not satisfied. She must have money and broad lands, and these he gave her with a prodigal hand and without a murmur. The exchequer was drained to keep her purse supplied ; one fat manor after another called her its lady, until she counted them in no fewer than seventeen shires. She was the most richly dowered woman in his kingdom ; but still she schemed and cajoled for more and more broad acres, and from each she exacted the last penny she could extort from its unhappy tenant.

An illustration of her greed is furnished by the following story. The manor of Oxhey had been devised to the monks of St Albans by a pious lady, Joan Whitewell, but the monks were never to benefit by the devise, for a rival claimant to the manor presented himself in one Thomas Fitzjohn, who tried his utmost to dispute the monks' enjoyment of it. When he failed, Alice Perrers came on the scene, purchased the manor from Fitzjohn for a tenth of its value, and sent a force of armed men to secure possession of it. To the King's favourite,

thus supported, the abbot was compelled to yield ; and thus another manor, filched from the Church, was added to the long list which called her mistress.

Never, perhaps, with the exception of George I.'s " Maypole Duchess," has a royal mistress reaped so rich a harvest from a king's infatuation. Jewels and silks and rich manors were but a part of the spoil of this weaver's or tiler's daughter. The wardship of infants and their estates added a substantial sum to her annual revenue ; in conjunction with Lord Latimer and a London merchant called Lyons, she created a " corner " in food which, while it brought starvation to thousands of poor homes, yielded her a rich return. She sold fat offices under the Crown to the highest bidders ; and she determined the fall of the scales of justice in favour of any litigant who was willing to pay her price, taking her seat by the judge's side to ensure that his decisions should be always in favour of her client.

So powerful did she become that on one occasion even the Pope came to her as a suppliant, when he sought his brother's release from captivity ; and William of Wykeham, Edward's chancellor and his greatest subject, paid court to her rather than to his master. She was, in fact, England's queen, in all but name, and put on all the airs of a sovereign lady. Stories have come down to us of some of her splendid appearances before her subjects,

“notably at a tournament given in her honour at Smithfield to which she made her regal progress, sitting by the King’s side in a magnificent car, attired as the ‘Lady of the Sun’ in gorgeous robes of gold-cloth and ermine.” Behind her followed, as retinue, a long procession of plumed knights, each leading by the bridle a palfrey, “on which was mounted a gay damsel.” Every day for a week she rode thus through the streets of the city, bowing graciously to the forced cheers and scowling faces of London’s citizens, her smile undisturbed when the word “witch,” or worse, came to her ears.

But her reign of splendour and plunder was not to be an unbroken triumph. There had long been murmurings against her evil influence over the King, her rapacity and her mischievous interference with justice, when in 1376 the storm broke over her head. The Commons (known to history as the “Good Parliament”) rose in arms against her and her myrmidons, determined to put an end to her “dyshonest malapertness.” Among the many accusations against her were charges of witchcraft, “bringing dishonour to the King’s soul and disease to his body by her wantonness,” and her too great intimacy with Sir William de Windsor, the King’s lieutenant in Ireland. As evidence of her witchcraft it was alleged that she kept in her house a Dominican friar who was a magician “given to wycked enchantments, by whose experiments Ales

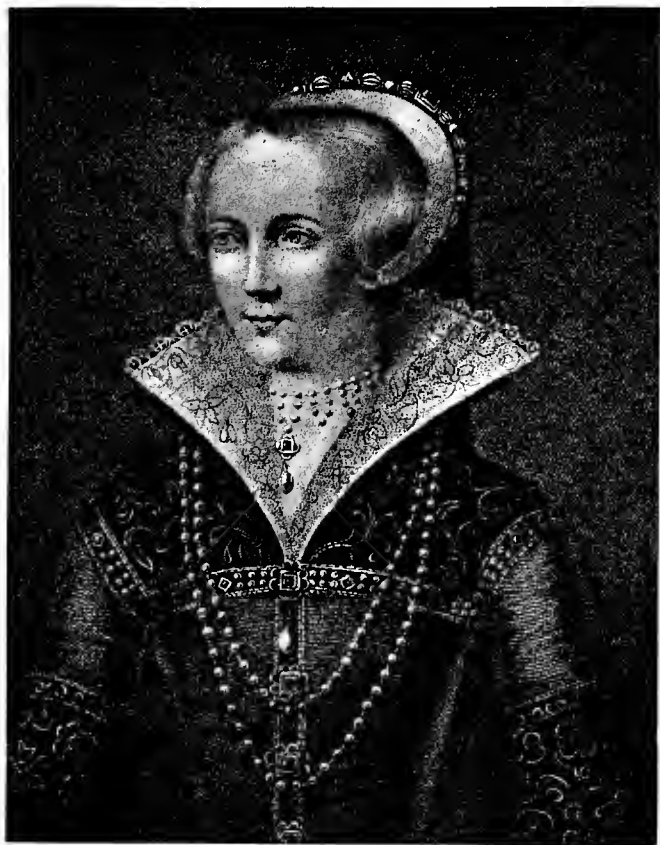
allured the Kynge to her unlawfull love." This wicked monk had, according to the evidence, made pictures of Edward and Alice, which, with the help of incantations, gave her complete power over her lover.

With such damning evidence against her (for it was an easy matter to prove every charge to the hilt) there is small wonder that the Parliament presented to the King a unanimous petition for her removal ; or that Edward, shocked by such revelations (especially that of her infidelity), should protest but feebly against it. He stipulated only that she should not be harshly dealt with, and she was compelled to take an oath never again to come near the King under penalty of perpetual banishment, excommunication and the forfeiture of her estates.

Alice's sun now seemed to have set in eclipse ; but before many months of her sentence had passed the revolution of the political wheel brought about her return and with it a longing for revenge on her enemies. With the death of the Black Prince, the Duke of Lancaster, her friend, assumed the reins of power, and Alice had little difficulty in persuading him to make Peter de la Mare, Speaker of the Parliament which had procured her downfall, her first victim. He was sentenced to life imprisonment at Nottingham ; and thus one formidable enemy was disposed of. William of Wykeham

was deprived of his temporalities ; and one after another all who had dared to raise a voice against the King's favourite were made to feel the weight of her vengeance. The new Parliament was, for obvious reasons, favourably disposed to her ; and once more her sun shone with its former splendour.

But Edward was now drawing near to the end of his long reign ; and no sooner had Alice Perrers grasped her sceptre again than she felt it slipping from her hand. She would at least retain her empire to the last ; and with this object she was inseparable from the King during the closing years of his life, shutting the door against all who sought to come near the dying man. With her frivolous chatter of hawking and hunting, of Court gossip, of the coming great tournament he had planned for her amusement, of anything calculated to interest or amuse him, she drew his thoughts away from the rapidly nearing end of all things for him, coaxing from him one gift after another to add to her ill-gotten hoard. But when at last all her babble and forced gaiety could no longer blind him to the fact that he was at the point of death, he turned impatiently away from her and bade her leave him and send a priest in her place. A few hours later he drew his last breath, with the priest's prayers in his ears and a crucifix close clasped in his hands.



Jane Shore.

Even in the presence of death the wanton was unable to keep her rapacious hands in check ; for, as a quaint chronicler of the times tells us, “ so sone as she saw the Kynge had set foote within death’s dores, she bethought her of flyghte ; yet before she went, that all men myght perceave that she loved not the Kynge for himselfe, but for that whiche was his, she tooke the rings from his fingers, which for his royal majestie he was wont to weare—thus yielding hym suche thanks for his benefits, she bad him adieu and so withdrewd herselfe from him.”

Although her lover was dead Alice was by no means disposed to retire from the scene of her triumphs ; and so long as the Duke of Lancaster was playing Regent to his nephew, Richard II., she seems to have made good use of her remaining opportunities of plunder ; for we read of much further spoil, varying from “ fourteen long cushions and eight small ones of white camara ” to “ a crucifix with the images of Mary and John for a frontal.”

The coming of Richard II.’s new Parliament and the release of Peter de la Mare from his Nottingham prison brought a swift change in her fortunes. Alice, who had now prudently withdrawn herself to her Pallenswick estate (where Hammersmith now stands), was promptly dragged from her retirement to answer a formidable array

of charges—the old accusations revived—and, with no solitary voice raised in her defence, found herself once more sentenced to banishment and to forfeiture of all her possessions. At last a blow had fallen from which, surely, there could be no hope of recovery ; but Alice's heart was as stout as it was false, she had still another card to play in the game that seemed hopelessly lost ; and this card she produced when she induced her former paramour, Sir William de Windsor, to marry her and to constitute himself her champion.

And Sir William proved himself as successful in the rôle of champion as in that of lover ; for he pleaded her cause so skilfully before Parliament that he secured a reversal of the former judgment ; and after a further year of fighting recovered the forfeited estates, which, however, he took good care to have granted to himself as her husband. Thus at the eleventh hour Alice wrested victory from the jaws of defeat ; but her triumph proved but a sorry one, for the crafty Windsor, on one pretext or another, contrived to retain possession of her estates until his death, when to her dismay she found that his will contained no mention of her name, and that the lands she had so covetously grasped had gone from her for ever.

Nemesis had at last overtaken her. Stripped of all her possessions, she spent the remainder of her life in vain attempts to recover them. One lawsuit

followed another, each involving her deeper in debt. All her petitions to the King drew from him no word of answer. Her life-cup, which had been so sweet to the tasting, was now drained to its last dregs of bitterness, which she was compelled to swallow. Fortunately for her, out of the wreckage of her vast fortune there still remained a small estate at Upminster, to which she was able to retire to spend her last years of friendlessness and poverty—an object of derision to her neighbours, who were not slow to recall her shameful story.

Here, as her end drew near, she sought solace in a belated piety ; and here she died, after a brief illness, one summer day in the year 1400, leaving a will which is eloquent alike of the straits to which she had been reduced, and of her realisation of the vanity of life ; for the small legacies she was able to leave, ranging from forty shillings downwards, are almost without exception to the church of Upminster and its officials or for charitable purposes. She bequeaths “ an ox for a mortuary, forty shillings for candles to burn about her body, and ten marks for ornaments.” To her two daughters, Jane and Joan (the former of whom was almost certainly Edward’s child as well as her own), she leaves “ all the manors and advowsons which John Wyndstore or others have, by his consent, usurped ” —a visionary legacy which neither ever took the trouble to claim.

Thus, a tardy penitent, without a friend or the memory of a single good act to comfort her last hours, died one of the basest women who have ever exploited the folly of a king to gratify their greed.

CHAPTER VI

A ROYAL "WOMAN-HATER"

FREDERICK II. of Prussia, known to fame as Frederick the Great, had his share of royal weaknesses ; but it can at least be claimed for him that, in an age notorious for its moral laxity, he set an example of clean-living which scarcely one of his fellow-sovereigns cared to follow.

Among epicures he had few rivals in Europe, and he would take as much pride in arranging a menu of delicacies as in planning a campaign. His table was, it is true, rarely served with more than eight dishes ; for, as he said, " he who is not content with eight will not be satisfied with eighty " ; but each dish was as perfect as human skill could make it, and two of them were invariably from his own recipes, and at times, it is said, of his own cooking. While content to wear " ragged linen, dirty shirts, old clothes and cracked boots," he squandered fortunes on rare and costly snuff-boxes, of which he left as many as one hundred and thirty, valued at a million and a half thalers. So great was his craze for snuff, of which he always kept two thousand

pounds' weight in store, that, according to Lord Malmesbury, "one could hardly approach his Majesty without sneezing."

As Crown Prince he had a positive mania for monkeys, which he kept, grotesquely dressed, in his room—shrieking with laughter at their strange antics. As King he transferred his affection to his greyhounds, which were his constant companions at home, in his walks and journeys, and even on the field of battle. So great was his devotion to his beloved hounds, that when news came to him in Silesia that his favourite, Alcmene, was dead, he gave orders for its body to be placed in a coffin in the library; and on his return he "would for two or three days look at it for whole hours, in silent grief, weeping bitterly."

But perhaps his ruling passion was for the theatre and all things theatrical. It was he who established the Italian Opera in Berlin, paying the entire cost out of his own pocket. "The theatre," we are told, "cost Frederick nearly four hundred thousand thalers a year. The admission was free, the boxes being assigned to the Court, the Ministers, Privy Councillors, etc. The pit was filled by the military, every regiment of the garrison sending a certain number of men." To Berlin came all the best companies from the other capitals of Europe; and the King was never happier than when gossiping informally with the artistes in the green-room, or

attending, and when the mood seized him superintending, the rehearsals.

At times, with royal inconsistency, he grew weary of his plaything, as when he once exclaimed, "The opera people are such a blackguardly set that I shall send them all packing. I must have money for cannon, and cannot spend so much on these mountebanks"; or when, in one of his parsimonious moods, he said, "Who in the world but a fool would give four thousand thalers to a dancer (Monsieur Vestris), besides three thousand to his sister, and one thousand to his brother?"

Such in his lighter and weaker moods was this grandson of the first of our Georges, one of the greatest soldiers and statesmen of any age, and one of the ablest rulers who ever wore a crown—who, before he died, doubled the area of Prussia, and laid surely the foundations of her present greatness. That he escaped the frailty that marred the lives of his brother-kings was, no doubt, largely due to temperament and the rigid training prescribed by his father.

He had in his veins none of the heated blood of the Louis' of France or the Tsars of Russia, which explains, if it does not excuse, their flagrant immoralities. The most beautiful women of his Court smiled on him in vain. "He was an iceberg," one of these baffled beauties declared; "and the woman is not born who can thaw him." He was equally

blind to the blandishments of the most bewitching actresses from Paris and St Petersburg ; and the witchery of twinkling feet and the graceful posturings of the sylphs of the ballet, while they pleased his eyes, left his heart untouched.

So insensible was this austere soldier to all the seductive arts of beauty that he was dubbed by his subjects the "woman-hater"—a name which has come down to us as inseparably associated with him as the description "Great," won by his skill as a soldier, statesman and empire-builder. But impregnable as he appeared, and in his later years was, to the assaults of woman, his armour of defence was not without its points of weakness.

In his youth he was, if we are to believe the records, no *chevalier sans reproche* in the lists of love. Stories are told of indiscretions which marked him as no cold-blooded youth ; and we know that when, in his father's company, he paid a visit to the dissolute Court of Augustus of Saxony, he took no reluctant part in the dissipations provided by his host. As the Margravine of Baireuth tells us in her Memoirs, "Augustus, the Strong, loved the pleasures of this world, and had a complete harem. His excesses baffle all description. The Prussian King and the Crown Prince were drawn into a perfect whirl of pleasures and amusements"—not the least of which was the Prince's dallying with the lovely Countess Orselska, whose reputed father

was Augustus himself. When, a little later, the Saxon King visited Berlin, the Countess came in his train ; and once again Frederick was caught in the toils of her allurements.

Nor is this the sum of his peccadilloes as a young man ; for a tragic story is told of his infatuation for the beautiful daughter of a Potsdam clergyman. When the King heard of his son's secret assignations with the parson's daughter his rage, a chronicler tells us, was terrible. Not content with depriving and severely punishing the girl's innocent father, he gave orders that she should be flogged and sent to Spandau for three years' hard labour—a sentence which she survived to give her hand in marriage to a cab proprietor and to end her days in poverty, shorn of every vestige of the beauty that had proved so dangerous.

When, in his turn, Frederick succeeded to the Prussian crown in 1740, and assumed the responsibilities not only of a king, but of a married man, he put behind him, once for all, as he thought, all such vanities of the flesh ; and played his new rôle so well that, as we have seen, he soon qualified for the description, the "woman-hater." It was the King's passion for his theatre that proved his undoing—his ambition to draw to his capital all the talent of Europe. All the most famous operatic singers, all the most graceful dancers of the Continent, came readily enough at his bidding, with one

exception—La Barbarina, the idol of London, Paris and Venice, the most beautiful and bewitching dancer of her age, who alone eluded him and turned her daring back on his most seductive offers.

But Frederick the Great was not the man to be thus baffled by a woman's caprice. When flattering advances and dazzling offers failed, he entrusted the task of conquering the coy beauty to his minister at Venice, Count Cataneo, whose diplomatic arts at last succeeded in winning her consent to go to Berlin, at a salary of seven thousand thalers, with five months' annual holiday.

Frederick was delighted with his tardy success ; but his delight was short-lived, for scarcely was the ink dry on the contract when Barbarina changed her mind and vowed that she would not leave Venice. When she was induced to put her signature to the agreement she was fresh from a quarrel with her lover, a handsome young Scotsman, Lord Stuart Mackenzie, and in her anger had gladly seized the opportunity to put half the Continent between her and him. But reconciliation had swiftly followed ; and she was now as determined not to fulfil her contract as she had been glad to sign it. Moreover, she announced that she had been secretly married to the young Scottish Lord, and was on the point of accompanying him to his home.

But the fickle lady had, for once, found her master. The most powerful and autocratic king in

Europe was not to be thwarted at the last moment by a wilful woman, and he promptly sent a message to Venice, with threats of his royal anger if the Senate did not do its utmost to bring Barbarina to a more submissive frame of mind. Thus driven into a corner, forced to choose between Berlin and arrest, she made a virtue of necessity and was soon on her way to the Prussian capital with a strong escort of cavalry ; her lover following, disguised, in her wake, bribing the innkeepers on the way, and thus contriving to place many a love missive in the hands of his lady.

At Vienna he induced Count Dolma to send a letter in advance to Frederick, begging the King to release Barbarina from her contract and promising to make her his wife immediately ; and he also sent a very pathetic letter of his own, pleading his cause with all a lover's eloquence. All Frederick's reply to these appeals was a peremptory order that Barbarina should make her first appearance at the Royal Theatre on 14th May 1744.

It was a proud moment for the Prussian King when at last the Venetian dancer pirouetted on to the stage, a dazzling vision of loveliness and grace, bounding with so light a foot that it scarcely seemed to touch the floor. Her success was immediate, electrical. The entire house rose in a frenzy of enthusiasm ; tornadoes of cheers swept through it, and bouquets fell in rainbow showers at the diva's

feet. It was a moment of triumph for Barbarina, of intoxication for the King, who rose from his seat and, forgetful for once of his royal dignity, led the storm of applause.

The "iceberg" was thawed at last, by the heat of a new and sudden passion which flamed in his breast. The conqueror of Silesia was himself vanquished by the twinkle of pretty feet, the ravishing grace of movement, and the intoxication of a dazzling smile and a pair of eyes a-dance with youth and the joy of life ; and it was not long before it was rumoured abroad that the "woman-hater" king was the abject slave of the pretty dancer from Venice. He was known to spend hours alone with her in her apartments after the performance was over. She had the place of honour at his right hand at the exclusive suppers of *Sans Souci* ; and her portrait, painted by his order by the greatest artist in Prussia, smiled down on him from the wall of his library. Such was his ardour that he even wrote verses in praise of her beauty, and sang for her pleasure love ditties of his own composition.

The fame of her dancing and her loveliness ran throughout Prussia, and poets vied with each other in paying homage to her in French and German, and even Latin ; her drives and walks in the streets of Berlin were regal progresses ; and when she appeared on the stage, disappointed thousands were turned away from the theatre doors. And wher-

ever the King went she was his constant companion, riding by his side at reviews, and accompanying him on journeys of state, and on his yearly pilgrimage to Pyrmont for the baths. Her Scottish lover was forgotten in the glamour of her royal conquest. Two miserable months he spent in Berlin trying in vain to win a glance or a smile from her, and sending to her daily letters of appeal, without evoking a word of answer.

Many of his missives were in fact intercepted and placed in the King's hands—letters in which his chief desire seems to have been to protect her from harm. Thus in one letter, which never reached her, he writes: "I expect you always to be on your guard. Make it an inflexible rule never to dine with anyone, whoever he may be, and never for a moment to be left alone with any man. Do not on any account receive anyone when you are in bed. Do not see the same man too often, that you may not be made the subject of gossip, which, however untrue, may yet do you harm, especially now when all eyes are on you, and all you do is exaggerated."

Then follows a touching final appeal, for the broken-hearted lover had been ordered by the King to leave Berlin. "This evening I go on board the vessel that is to take me far from you. Think of me when you hear the wind blowing, and think that it is perhaps bringing you my last benediction."

But Barbarina had no sighs or tears for the lover

she had so lightly forgotten. She had a hundred other lovers ready to fall at her feet, or to fly at each other's throats for her sake. With what madness she fired their blood is shown by a story told by Campbell in his "Life and Times of Frederick the Great." La Barbarina was dancing before the King and his Court in the crowded opera house ; and in the front row of the stalls two of her greatest admirers were feasting their eyes on her grace and her charms—the son of a Berlin banker, and Baron Coceji, son of the Chancellor, a giant in stature and strength, and a man whose jealousy was as great as his passion.

Suddenly Coceji, fancying that La Barbarina had smiled more sweetly at his rival than at himself, rose in a fury of rage, seized his neighbour by the shoulders and legs and flung him over the heads of the orchestra on to the stage. A thrill of horror and indignation ran through the house ; men rose from their seats to rush on the cowardly assailant, but the upraised hand of the King sent them back again and quiet was restored.

Then it was that the victim of the outrage, having picked himself up, limped to the front of the stage and explained his dramatic "entrance." "It is not my fault," he said, "that I have made such a sudden appearance on the stage. I was flung here, much against my will, by Baron Coceji"—an explanation which was greeted with

shouts of sympathetic laughter. Coceji paid for his jealous outburst by a sentence of exile ; and La Barbarina's star shone still brighter as a heroine of beauty and romance.

Meanwhile, each day saw Frederick more and more under the spell of her witchery ; for in addition to her beauty she had a tongue as clever as her brain. She had, or affected to have, a hundred tastes in common with her royal lover. She adored the theatre, she was a clever musician, she shared his devotion to animals, and she was lost in admiration of his collection of snuff-boxes. She had, too, all the tact of a diplomatist and the flattering arts of a courtier. With such an equipment for conquest, allied to a voice of singular sweetness and a manner now caressing, now bewitching in its coquetry, it is perhaps small wonder that Barbarina made an ardent lover of the austere "hater" of her sex.

But her conquest was destined, after all, to be brief. For four years Frederick remained secure and happy in her toils. Then satiety seized him ; he grew weary of his pretty plaything, her moods and her extravagances, and gave the first proof of his emancipation when he refused point-blank to pay any more of her debts. And when Barbarina, realising that her reign was over, departed for England to seek solace in her former lover, he said good-bye with a scarcely suppressed sigh of relief. Whether she met again the Scottish lord whom she

had treated so cavalierly, we do not know; we know, however, that within a few months she was back again in Berlin, and was privately married to the young giant, Coceji, who had given such a startling exhibition of his jealousy in the Royal Theatre.

Her bridal bed, however, was not to be one of roses. The Coceji family, furious at such a *mésalliance*, appealed to the King to have the marriage nullified and the designing dancer banished from the country; and Barbarina had the mortification of seeing her former royal lover arrayed with the enemy against her, and declaring that he would not allow his Chancellor's family to be degraded by an alliance with a mere dancer.

He even issued an order for the arrest of the bridegroom and his incarceration in the Castle of Altlandsberg; whereupon Barbarina addressed to him a humble appeal, if not for his favour, at least for mercy.

“Your Majesty's high sense of honour [she wrote], which abhors all treachery of the heart, gives me hope. May a gracious response to the prayers of your subject put an end to the trouble of one who has the honour to be, Sire, your Majesty's most obedient and dutiful servant,

“BARBARINA COCEJI.”

In the course of her petition she begs the King's

clemency on the ground that she is about to become the mother of a Prussian subject and that she had bought a house in Berlin with the hope of founding a family which should be a credit to the country over which he ruled.

To this appeal from a woman whom he had no doubt loved deeply and sincerely, Frederick, who could be generous as well as just, gave a gracious answer. He not only countermanded his order for the arrest of the Baron, but took considerable trouble to bring about a reconciliation between him and his parents, who, however, still remained obdurate even to the King's pleading.

For forty years Barbarina lived more or less happily with her husband, until divorce in 1789 severed the long union. The remainder of her days she spent in seclusion and works of charity, founding an establishment for the benefit of young ladies of the nobility, winning the hearts of her poor neighbours by her bounty, and honoured by the noble families of Silesia for her gifts of mind and character and her unaffected charm of manner. She survived her royal lover thirteen years, and lived to receive from his successor the title of Countess Campanini before death claimed her one June day in the year 1799.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROMANCE OF THE "BELOVED PRINCESS"

OF the fifteen children who called George III. father, the flower of the very mingled flock, which contained a more than liberal share of "black sheep," was undoubtedly the Princess Amelia, who was cradled at Queen's House one August day in the year 1783, the last occupant of Queen Charlotte's nursery :

" With all the Virtues blest and every grace
To charm the world and dignify her race."

Miss Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay) draws a charming picture of this last comer of the royal princesses, as she saw her on the terrace at Windsor, where George loved to promenade of a summer evening with his numerous family and his courtiers.

" It was," said Miss Burney, " a mighty pretty procession. The little Princess, just turned three years old, in a robe-coat covered with fine muslin, a dressed close cap, white gloves and a fan, walked on alone and first, highly delighted in the parade, and turning from side to side to see everybody as she passed."

When the King, catching sight of Mrs Delaney



The Princess Amelia.

among the onlookers, stopped to speak to her, Miss Burney continues, "the Princess, slowly of her own accord, came behind Mrs Delaney to look at me. 'I'm afraid,' said I, 'your Royal Highness does not remember me.' What think you was her answer? An arch little smile and nearer approach with her lips pouted out to kiss me. I could not resist so innocent an invitation; but the moment I had accepted I was half afraid it might seem in so public a place an improper liberty. However, there was no help for it."

Such at the age of three was the Princess Amelia—lovely, winsome, affectionate, with a quaint sense of her own importance, as when "she commands the company to sit down, holds out her little fat hand to be kissed, and makes a distant curtsy with an air of complacency and encouragement that might suit any princess of five times her age." That a child so full of charm should be the idol of the family was inevitable. The King, her father, over whom the cloud of insanity was already brooding, idolised her. She was the pet and plaything of her brothers and sisters, some of whom were old enough to be her parents; while to all at Court she was the "beloved princess."

Time, which so often steals away the charms of childhood, added each year some touch of beauty and grace to the Princess Amelia, who at fourteen was, to quote Miss Burney again, "full as tall as

the Princess Royal, and as much formed. She has an innocence, a Hebe blush, an air of modest candour, and a gentleness so caressingly inviting of voice and manner that I have seldom seen a more captivating young creature." She developed a rare skill in painting and music; she loved to sing and dance and was full of fun and high spirits; while she excelled all her sisters as a graceful horsewoman. Unfortunately she had developed too rapidly, had outgrown her strength; for with her approach to young womanhood began that delicacy of health which was to make so much of the remainder of her brief life a martyrdom to herself and a cause of anxiety to all who loved her.

At fifteen she had a serious illness which compelled her to spend some months at Worthing, whence she writes to Lady Albinia Cumberland: "I am not as yet allowed to get off my couch. Since I saw you I have been cupped. Yesterday I had on leeches, etc., this evening I got into a hot sea-bath. Everybody is so good I know not what to say." It was while recovering from this illness that Miss Burney once more met the Princess, who "was seated on a sofa, in a French grey riding-dress with pink lapels, her beautiful and richly flowing and shining fair locks unornamented. Her breakfast was still before her and Mrs Cheveley was in waiting. Lady Albinia announced me, and she [the Princess] received me with the brightest

smile, calling me up to her and stopping my profound reverences by pouting out the sweet ruby lips for me to kiss. She desired me to come and sit by her ; but ashamed of so much indulgence, I seemed not to hear her, and drew a chair at a little distance. . . . ' No, no ! ' she cried, nodding ; ' come and sit by me here, my dear Madame d'Arblay.' "

Other serious illnesses followed, each but serving to refine her beauty and to add to her gentleness and sweetness. " She seems too fair and sweet a flower to bloom long in this world," Lady Albinia wrote during a visit with her charge to Weymouth in 1801. But a new influence was soon to come into the Princess's life, to open a new wonder-world for her, and to do more for her than all the doctors in England could accomplish. To Weymouth one day came General Fitzroy, one of her father's equerries, sent by him to attend the Princess on her daily rides, and his coming opened to her a new chapter in her life.

The Hon. Charles Fitzroy, second son of Lord Southampton, and nephew of the third Duke of Grafton, was the handsomest man at George's Court, a man who allied a singular charm of manner and rare accomplishments to an unaffected modesty. He was a special favourite of the King and the royal family, by whom he was dubbed " Prince Charles," partly in tribute to his descent

from the "Merry Monarch," and partly to his distinction of carriage and manner. At the Courts of Europe he had won equally golden opinions. Frederick the Great was one of his most ardent admirers, and the Duchess of Brunswick, sister to George III., wrote of him to the Duchess of Argyll :

"Tell Lord Southampton we all love his son for his good, affectionate heart and his attachment to his parents." No man at the English Court could thus have seemed a safer companion for the beautiful young Princess ; no man, in fact, could have been better equipped to win her affection.

With such a fascinating companion for her daily rides—for although General Fitzroy was twenty years her senior he was singularly youthful for his thirty-eight years—it is little wonder that admiration of her handsome escort quickly ripened into a warmer and tenderer feeling. When she returned to Windsor it was remarked by watchful eyes that the Princess, on her daily rides with the King, would leave her father's side and drop behind, nearer to the equerry ; and that in the evening he was her invariable partner at cards.

So alarmed at these manifestations of affection became Miss Gomme, the Princess's governess, that she considered it her duty to call the Queen's attention to the matter, with the result that her Majesty wrote to her daughter a letter full of

counsels of prudence, and begging her not to be angry with Miss Gomme for bringing the matter to her notice. Of the dangers of the intimacy the letter reveals no suspicion, the Queen's chief anxiety being to conciliate her daughter and her governess, and to keep all knowledge of the affair from the King, whose health was causing great anxiety.

"The constant opportunities for meeting, the daily rides, the private correspondence, the loving glances in church, the games of cards in the evening, were all allowed to continue as before. Thus a secret understanding sprang up between the lovers; and by the autumn of the year they had sworn eternal devotion to each other."

Many of the letters which the Princess wrote in these halcyon days to her lover have survived; and all are eloquent of an affection as deep as it was to prove lasting. Thus, in the first of them, written within a few months of the first meeting at Weymouth, the Princess writes:

"MY OWN DEAR ANGEL,—I am sure you love me as well as ever. If you can give me a kind word or look to-night, pray do; and look for me to-morrow riding. Don't leave me; do let us be, if we can, in comfort; but tell me your mind and the truth. I shall go to chapel to-morrow, now *do* sit where I may see you, not as you did last

Sunday morning. Good God, what I then suffered! Do have your dear hair cut, and keep it for me. . . . I hoped yesterday, at latest last night, that I should have heard from you. I daresay you had not time; and, as you wrote that precious note before you went, I ought to have been satisfied, but that I never am, separate from you, dear Angel."

Thus for two years the lovers lived golden days, with nothing to cloud their happiness. The King was in ignorance of the romance; the Queen appears to have been indifferent to it so long as no scandal resulted; Amelia's brothers and sisters looked on with an amiable toleration, when they did not actually encourage the intimacy. But still Amelia was no nearer the goal of her desires—to be the wife of the man she worshipped. The hopelessness of her passion at last began to prey on her health; and in the summer of 1803 she was again dangerously ill, so ill that, in contemplation of death, she wrote the following touching declaration of her wishes:—

"It is my last dying and only wish that to you, my beloved Charles Fitzroy, my best friend and everything, and whom nothing but my unfortunate situation parts me from—as I feel assuredly I am the chosen of your heart, as you are of mine—I leave you everything I have, and request you to look

over everything, and that all the treasures I wear should be buried with me. Lose no time in executing my wishes.

"AMELIA."

But death was not yet to claim her. By the end of the year she was well again, and looking forward hopefully to the future, when she might perhaps be allowed to marry her beloved General. The Royal Marriage Act which at present barred her way to the altar had one provision that encouraged her hopes. When she reached the age of twenty-five (in five years' time) she could give notice to the Privy Council of her intended marriage; and if within a year Parliament did not forbid it, the marriage would be valid. Meanwhile she was wife in all but name; and from this time all her letters to her lover are signed "A.F.R."—Amelia Fitzroy.

But her moods of happiness and glad expectation were alternated by despondency and tears. It was so long to wait; and the hand of Fate might still snatch the cup from her lips. When she spent a few weeks at Stoke Bruerne Park, the home of the Wentworth Vernons, it is said, "She would remain indoors all day, passing her time in weeping and lamentation. But at night when the laundress brought the clothes to the house, she would be let down in the clothes-basket from the window, and wander in the park till early morning, when she was dragged up again. At night, too, she would

sometimes get into a chaise and be driven over to Sholebrook [the house of General Fitzroy], returning to Stoke at early dawn."

Her letters to her lover at this time are more ardent than ever. "Marry you, my own dear Angel, I really must and will," she writes in the summer of 1804. "I glory in our attachment. I pine after my dear Charles more and more every instant. . . . Your dear letter ! O, what a treasure ! I shall keep it, and read it over and over every day. I long for a comfortable ride. Don't leave me an instant of the ride. Pray don't alter in your manner to me in any way, my dear Angel. I really must marry you, though inwardly united, and in reality that is much *more* than the ceremony, yet that ceremony would be a protection. O, my precious darling; how often do I say—would to God my own husband and best friend and guardian was here to protect and assist me, as I am sure was destined in Heaven ; I should then have nothing to fear."

"Conscious innocence," says Mrs Villiers, her devoted friend, "made the Princess not pause to consider the opinion of the world ; and she gloried in her attachment to so honourable and upright a person as was Charles Fitzroy." But mischievous tongues were once more to cause the Princess great unhappiness. Miss Gomme, accused of "winking at" the intimacy, retaliated by seek-

ing an interview with the Princess Elizabeth, to whom she said it was time still to save Princess Amelia, who was all but ruined—that all the world was talking of her behaviour ; that General Fitzroy was always in her room, and that she took that room to have him, for he was seen always coming up and going out at particular hours.

This scandalous story Amelia told in a letter to her lover, adding, " You may imagine all I have suffered ; but I love you much, *much* more dearly than ever. My dear Angel, I am so full of you. I shall go mad if I don't see you before you go ! Pray God we may ride Wednesday. I have so much to say to you. Never check yourself now with me. We are married."

" One day," says Mrs Villiers, " on entering Princess Amelia's room I found her drowned in tears, and apparently in a state of great agony of mind. She threw herself into my arms, saying she could no longer bear to be silent with me on the subject nearest to her heart ; but that now she could keep silence no longer, for she had been tormented and insulted beyond endurance by Miss Gomme, who had threatened to expose her to the Queen."

The Queen had written another letter to her daughter, counselling her to " subdue at once every passion in the beginning, and to consider the impropriety of indulging any impression which

must make you miserable, and be a disgrace to yourself and a misery to all who love you." And the poor Princess was so distracted by the attack on her fair fame and her mother's censure that, to quote Mrs Villiers, she had almost made up her mind to leave the Castle with General Fitzroy, marry him directly and take her chance of forgiveness—a step from which Mrs Villiers with difficulty dissuaded her.

It was inevitable that, sooner or later, the voice of scandal should reach the ears of the King. A painful interview took place in 1808 between father and daughter, which resulted in a serious breach between them. But even this crowning trouble was powerless to cause Amelia to waver in her loyalty. The continued strain, however, proved too great for her strength, and symptoms of consumption began to show themselves. Once more she poured out her soul to Fitzroy in a letter which "you will receive when I am dead."

"O God," she cries, "how I do love you! Each day and hour has endeared you to me; accept the gratitude and affection of her who owes you everything—for ever your most affectionate friend and wife—I own I can never help praying and hoping a time may yet come when the Almighty may bless and join us in persons, as we are in hearts, ever inseparable. . . . I have loved you,

prized and esteemed you more every instant. God bless you, my own dearest and most beloved Angel ! Ever on earth or in Heaven equally your attached wife and darling,

" A.F.R."

When on 7th August 1808 the Princess completed her twenty-fifth year she wrote to the Lord Chancellor, desiring him to acquaint the Privy Council of her intention to marry General Fitzroy and imploring his influence and support. She also wrote to her brother, the Prince of Wales, informing him of this act and declaring, " I am willing to give up family and everything to devote my life to that object of my affection for whom only I value my existence. General Fitzroy possesses all my affection, and for years I have considered myself his lawful wife, though suffering all the trials of that without ever enjoying my rights."

But a sterner hand than that of the law was now being outstretched to bar the way to the altar and happiness. Consumption had the Beloved Princess in its remorseless clutches, and it rapidly became evident to all that her life was drawing to its end. So ill was she in May 1809 that Mrs Villiers wrote, " The Princess Amelia is really, I fear, dying. She has so little chance of happiness in this world that I believe it is selfish to wish her to live. The longer her illness lasts, the more

perfect she appears. I never in my life met with such sweetness of temper and resignation as hers and such wonderful consideration for all those who love her."

In the following summer the Princess had a remarkable rally, and once more life seemed to hold out golden promise. So far no answer had been received from the Privy Council, and this silence she interpreted as a happy augury. But the rally was brief; and again we find her, on the eve of leaving Windsor for Weymouth, writing her last wishes, and bequeathing her belongings—furniture, money, trinkets, books—to her beloved Charles Fitzroy. "Nothing," she writes, "but the cruel situation I am placed in of being daughter to the King, and the laws made by the King respecting the marriages of the royal family, prevents my being married to him *which I consider I am* in my heart, and which *vow* and *sole object* has been my comfort and guide these last ten years and can but end with my life."

But Weymouth had now no power to bring health back to the dying Princess, whose last days were embittered by "the harshness and unkindness she experienced from the Queen during all her sufferings," and also from her sister, the Princess Elizabeth, "who treated her with much cruel unkindness and ill-temper." From the rest of her family she received, however, the utmost tenderness

and sympathy, especially from the King, who, blind though he was, sent her many touching letters.

It is said that shortly before the end came the ceremony of marriage was actually gone through to give happiness to her last moments. The Princess of Wales wrote early in 1810, "Everyone believes that Princess Amelia is married to Mr Fitzroy, and they say she has confessed her marriage to the King, who is miserable at his expected loss of his daughter." But Mrs Villiers, who was in a position to know the truth, denies "that she was ever married, or ever had a child," and asserts that "it was conscious innocence that made her what her sisters call imprudent."

In July 1810 she wrote her last letter to her lover :

"MY EVER MOST BELOVED CHOSEN AND VALUED CHARLES [in which she arranged again for the disposal of her possessions. The letter begins],— This will you open when I am no longer an inhabitant of this world ; but I die as I have lived blessing you, and my only comfort is the hope I may now watch over you in spirit and hereafter we may be joined to part no more. [And closes :] Now, God bless you, and may He allow me to assist in watching and guarding your life, prays your dying, as did your living, affectionate
"AMELIA."

Day by day she sank more under her sufferings, her last hours comforted by visits from her blind father, "bending over her couch and speaking to her about salvation through Christ," and by clandestine visits from her faithful lover. And on All Souls' Day she died, as one dropping gently to sleep, her last words to her sister, Princess Mary, being, "Tell Charles I die blessing him."

CHAPTER VIII

MONSIEUR LE DUC AND THE MARQUISE

IN the latter years of the fourteenth Louis no lady in Paris kept the tongue of scandal more pleasantly wagging than Madame de Pleneuf, wife of a wealthy army contractor, whose sumptuous hotel was at the corner of the rues de Clery and Poissonnière. Twenty years younger than her bourgeois husband, whose second wife she was, Madame was as famous for her beauty as for her contempt for *les convenances*. "Tall, perfectly shaped, with an extremely agreeable countenance, intelligence, grace, tact and *savoir-vivre*," as Saint Simon describes her, she was a veritable queen of society and drew to her salons in the rue de Clery all fashionable Paris.

With an unsuspecting husband, whose duties took him away from his home for long and frequent periods, Madame had abundant opportunities to indulge her love of adventure, and there was never any lack of gallants to minister to her vanity and to worship at the shrine of her beauty. Her legion of lovers was recruited from all classes—princes and dukes, cardinals and canons, marshals and marquesses vied with each other for her smiles and

her favours, and to all, in turn, she was equally gracious.

She displayed great address in managing her crowd of *soupirants*. She knew how to pick and choose among her admirers ; and there was not one of the chosen band who dared to show either jealousy or mortification. Each one hoped for his turn ; and, while waiting, the choice more than suspected was respected by all in perfect silence, without the least altercation between them. “ All passed without protest from the rank of candidate for her favour to that of lover, and from that of lover to that of friend ; and of friends, in some instances, ready to make considerable sacrifices for her sake.”

Among the many children who came to this lady of the legion of lovers was a daughter, Agnes, cradled in 1698, who gave promise of a beauty greater even than that of her mother, and who was destined to prove her greatest rival. Before she had reached her sixteenth birthday all Paris was talking of the girl whose loveliness was already attracting crowds of admirers to the de Pleneuf mansion. Saint Simon waxed eloquent over her beauty, her exquisite figure, her singular captivation ; Duclos vowed that “ everything about her was seductive ” ; and President Herault went into ecstasies over her supple figure, and her nymph-like grace—“ her delicate face, well-formed nose,

blonde hair, expressive eyes ; in a word, a physiognomy refined and distinguished, and a voice as charming as her face."

Madame de Pleneuf had good cause to be proud of her beautiful child, her *fleur des pois*, and was devoted to her—until she began to realise that the lovers who had so long been her slaves were beginning to cast glances of a warmer admiration on her daughter. Then affection was gradually changed to dislike, and finally to the bitterest jealousy and hatred. "In proportion," Saint Simon tells us, "as the daughter pleased by a hundred attractions, she displeased her mother. The advantages of youth irritated her. Madame could not endure the sight of homage addressed to others than herself at her own house."

The climax came when the young and handsome Comte d'Augennes, the most favoured of Madame's lovers, transferred his affection to Agnes, and made open love to her under her mother's eyes. This was a crowning outrage and humiliation which was not to be tolerated. Her anger, which hitherto had found vent in petty spitefulness, burst all restraints ; and, after a violent scene, she declared that the girl should be placed in a convent, until a husband could be found to take proper charge of her ; and all Madame's energy and abilities were now directed to the finding of a son-in-law.

Fortunately for her, this was a simple matter.

There were many lovers eager to accept the rôle ; and before many weeks had passed the choice fell on the Marquis de Prie, a man twenty-five years older than Agnes, but of unimpeachable position. It is true that the Marquis's estates were heavily mortgaged ; but he was a member of one of the greatest families in France, a general in the army, Governor of Bourbon-Lancy and—godfather of the heir to the throne. To the easy-going M. de Pleneuf the match was ideal ; and he was very willing to part with a few of his money-bags for the honour of having for son-in-law a marquis, who was also godfather to the coming king !

Thus it came about that one day in 1713 Agnes de Pleneuf, still but a child of fifteen, blossomed into Madame la Marquise de Prie and was taken as a bride to dazzle the Court of Louis XIV. by her radiant young beauty. A few weeks later she was on her way to Turin with her middle-aged husband, who had been appointed Ambassador to the King of Sardinia.

For five years the Marquise remained in the capital of Piedmont, revelling in the homage paid to her beauty, the queen of every social gathering, and reasonably happy with her husband, who was at least always kind and attentive. Then, when life seemed at its fairest, the clouds of misfortune began to gather. Her father, who had long been suspected of fraud in connection with his army

contracts, was threatened with arrest, and when it was imminent fled, an unexpected guest, to his daughter's roof in Turin. In saving his person, however, he had forfeited his fortune, which was promptly sequestered to replace his ill-gotten gains ; and he arrived in Piedmont a disgraced and ruined man.

To the Marquis and his wife no calamity could have been greater ; for the Ambassador had been living as a prince largely on his father-in-law's well-lined purse. His own small fortune and his wife's dowry were exhausted, and poverty, if no worse, thus stared him in the face. For a time he kept disaster at bay by pawning his plate and borrowing money at usurious interest ; until at last, in despair, he decided to send the Marquise to Paris to beg assistance from the Government, if only to the extent of paying him the arrears of his salary.

It was a very different Paris to which Agnes de Pleneuf returned from that which she had left as a bride five years earlier. The Sun King was no more ; his dreary and decorous Court was replaced by the splendour and licence inaugurated by the Regent d'Orleans. " Vice, which for so many years had scarcely dared to rear its head, now stalked abroad naked and unashamed. Virtue, and even ordinary decency, was mocked at and derided. The pent-up impatience of a corrupt society was

finding relief in a veritable saturnalia of sensuality." Such was the capital and such the Court in which Madame de Prie now found herself, the most beautiful woman there and also the most unprotected; for poverty is but a feeble guardian of such virtue as she had inherited from her mother.

Although the Marquise lived obscurely in the house of one of her aunts—nothing would have induced her to share the home of her jealous mother, who was still pursuing pleasure as in the days of her prosperity—it was not long before gossip was busy with the name of the lovely Marchioness who was so often closeted with that arch-roué, the Regent, with the "wicked" Cardinal Dubois, and others in high places, of similar repute. She was frankly suspected of employing her charms to mend her broken fortunes; and her name was associated with such notorious gallants as d'Alencourt and the Maréchal de la Feuillade.

It was common knowledge that the Regent was much attracted by her, and that she had been present at many of the *petits soupers*—those midnight orgies of the Regent and his roués at which Paris, with all its new licence, affected to be shocked. And foremost among those who gave currency to these rumours was Madame's mother, whose jealousy had burst into fierce flame again at her daughter's new conquest and rivalry.

That there was no truth, or but little truth, in

these whisperings of scandal is more than probable. But true or false, Fate was preparing a revolution in the Marquise's life which was to prove that she was, after all, no unworthy daughter of her mother. One night in the autumn of 1719, at a ball at the Opera, the Duc de Bourbon, Prince of the Blood Royal, was attracted by two masked ladies of conspicuous grace and sprightliness, who led him a merry and tantalising dance, laughing impishly at all his requests that they would unmask and reveal their identity.

At the next Opera ball the two fair unknowns were again present, but this time in a more compliant mood ; for after much teasing and coquetting one of them at last removed her mask, and displayed to the delighted Prince the loveliest face he had ever seen—that of Madame la Marquise de Prié ; “ at sight of which *Monsieur le Duc* incontinently succumbed.” Such at least is one story of a meeting which for Duke and Marchioness was to be fraught with great consequences. That the Prince fell desperately in love with the Ambassador's wife at first sight, we know ; and also that, whether it was love on her part or not, she made small resistance when he asked her to become his “ mistress.” “ From the first hour until the time, six years later, when circumstances over which neither of them had any control came to force them apart, she dominated *Monsieur le Duc*

entirely, and he adored her with an intensity of devotion of which no one had believed him capable. He consecrated himself to her body and soul."

Nor was such devotion surprising, for, in addition to her peerless beauty, Madame de Prie possessed in a superlative degree the intelligence and tact, the clever brain and tongue which play so vital a part in the complete conquest of man. "She amused him," M. Thirion says; "she distracted him; she showed a profound respect for his decisions, which flattered his vanity. She never gave him advice except when asked for it." In short, she so insinuated herself into the heart and mind of the Prince that she "disposed of him as a slave."

Here, indeed, was a dramatic transformation for the wife of a ruined ambassador, the daughter of a bankrupt and disgraced father. As mistress of a royal duke, a possible heir to the throne of France, she found herself surrounded with luxury and splendour, worshipped by a lover who lived to minister to her pleasure. The Duc's inexhaustible purse provided the costliest jewels and gowns to deck her loveliness; the greatest artists in France clamoured to paint her charms, as the most famous poets sang them; and as a queen, arrayed in ravishing toilettes and blazing with diamonds, she did the honours of the Duc's palatial homes.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that such elevation

of a *petite bourgeoise*, the daughter of a fraudulent contractor, should excite jealousy and hatred among less-favoured women ; and soon there was no discreditable invention of her past which was not being circulated in Paris. From her childhood, the scandalmongers declared, she had been flagrantly immoral ; her extravagance had ruined her husband ; she had repaid her mother's devotion with base treachery and cruelty ; and as for the Prince, she had bewitched him by "initiating him into vices imported by her from Italy, and hitherto unknown in France." "*Chansons*, venomous satires, slanders, calumnies rained upon her until, if she had been a more sensitive woman, she might well have been driven to the verge of despair."

But Madame de Prie was no woman to cower before even such a tornado of scandal. Opposition was always her best tonic, and obstacles were made to be overcome. With supreme beauty and a clever brain for weapons, and her royal lover for champion, she could afford to smile at the most venomous inventions of jealous tongues. With infinite skill and diplomacy she won to her side one powerful supporter after another. The Regent, whose fancy she had quickly captivated, as we have seen, Cardinals Dubois and De Rohan (the latter, one of her mother's most favoured lovers and thus a great capture for her), the Duc de Richelieu, and many another great personage in the Government and at

the Court took up arms for her against her enemies, the most virulent of whom were Le Blanc, Secretary of State for War and the Comte de Belle-Isle.

Into the involved story of plot and counterplot, and of the subtle diplomacy with which she conducted her campaign, there is no space to enter. It must suffice to say that she not only confounded her enemies, but, by a crowning effort, secured the appointment of her lover to the premiership of France, within an hour after the Regent had drawn his last breath in the arms of Madame de Phalaris. *Monsieur le Duc* was now master of the realm, and Madame de Prie was mistress of all that was his.

It was a difficult task which the Duc de Bourbon had undertaken ; for the treasury was empty, commerce was ruined, and the Church and Court alike were rent by schism—the battle-grounds of contending factions. He faced the task, however, with a brave heart, and soon won popularity by his personal charm and magnanimity, and by reforms inspired by his mistress's tact. But, in spite of this temporary success, he quickly realised that he had powerful enemies. The boy-King looked coldly on him and even refused to grant him interviews ; the Orleanists to a man were arrayed against him ; and in Cardinal Fleury he had a foe as crafty as he was plausible.

For a time Madame de Prie abandoned herself to the enjoyment of her new and exalted position.

At her lover's palaces in Paris and at Versailles, the Hotel Condé and the Hotel of the Grand Master, she entertained with a regal hospitality—herself the soul of all gaiety and the centre of universal homage and admiration, bewitching all by her smiles and her coquetries, her sweet singing and her graceful acting. The Hotel of the Grand Master she converted into a veritable fairy palace, a wonder-house of paintings and statuary, tapestries and objects of art, gathered from all parts of the world at fabulous cost.

But it was not long before the storm of hatred raised by the enemies of her husband and herself broke. “Insults and menaces rained upon her and the Duc ; the most disgusting effusions concerning them were scattered about in the gallery and salons of Versailles and even in the bedchamber of the young King ; the most biting *chansons* circulated in Paris ; and almost every day came warnings that their lives were in danger.” This was no time for a frivolous pursuit of pleasure ; and Madame once more set herself to face the storm.

She entered enthusiastically into her lover's work, interviewed ministers, directed his patronage, guided his policy—in fact, took the reins into her own more capable hands. All who approached her were amazed at her industry, her shrewdness, her grasp of matters usually considered quite beyond the comprehension of a woman. “She was,” to

quote the Abbé Legendre, "a heroine capable of regulating the affairs of a vast Empire." She even succeeded in thawing the King's coldness, to such an extent indeed that, we read, "he laughed and jested with her, invited her to sup at his own table and to ride in his carriage to the chase ; and indeed he was so gracious to that lady that a rumour circulated in Paris that she and her fair friends had designs upon the virtue of the young Monarch."

One man's friendship, however, even all her arts were powerless to win, that of the crafty Cardinal, who, all smiles and flatteries to her face, was an implacable enemy of her and her lover behind their backs. The King himself was the merest puppet in the hands of Fleury, who was determined on the Duc's dismissal. Madame de Prie at last sought to conciliate him by offering to retire from public life. In March 1726 she withdrew to her estate near Lisieux, begging the Queen's permission to be allowed to remain there. The Cardinal was delighted at this evidence of victory ; but his delight was short-lived, for the Duc de Bourbon, deprived of his best counsellor, quickly sent orders that she should return to Versailles. This defiance of his wishes decided the Cardinal to strike. *Monsieur la Duc* must go, and his lady-love with him.

A few days later the Duc de Charost handed the Prime Minister an order from Louis to retire to

Chantilly until further orders. The King wished to govern for himself in future and would not require the Duc's services any longer. The blow, long expected, had fallen at last, and Fleury's triumph was complete. "Every day follows another and does not resemble it," the dismissed Premier wrote to his mother, Madame la Duchesse. "Yesterday I was Cæsar ; to-day I am Pompey. I am going to Chantilly ; and I count on your still preserving for me your good graces."

Two days later Madame de Prie, who had hastened to rejoin her lover at Chantilly, received a *lettre de cachet* exiling her to her husband's estate, Courbepine, in Normandy. Her parting with the Duc was most touching. "Twice after entering her carriage she returned, not being able, she said, to depart without again embracing Monsieur le Duc. She appeared in despair at leaving him and gave him all the tokens of a passionate love. The Prince, on his side, was so afflicted that it is impossible to describe it."

Thus in separation and exile closed Madame's six years' supremacy. But she was not long left to bewail her downfall. Shut off from the world of her past splendour in her remote Norman chateau, grieving less for herself than for her relatives and friends who, through her, were reduced to poverty, she spent the short remainder of her days in loneliness and sorrow.

In the autumn of 1727 she received such injuries in a carriage accident that, after a few weeks of painful lingering, her life closed on the 7th October, before she had seen her thirtieth birthday. As for *Monsieur le Duc*, he survived his mistress fourteen years. He was pardoned, and returned to Court in 1830 ; but he appeared no more on the political stage, preferring the peace of his study and his laboratory to the perilous pleasure of power.

CHAPTER IX

A FATAL PASSION

It was surely under an evil star that Rudolf, heir to the dual throne of Austria and Hungary, was cradled one August day in the year 1858. Son of an epileptic father and of a mother in whose veins ran the tainted blood of the Wittelsbachs—the blood which made madmen of his first cousins, Ludwig II. and Otho, Kings of Bavaria—the curse of insanity shadowed him from his very birth, and beyond a doubt was in some degree responsible for the terrible tragedy that closed his life thirty years later, at Mayerling, to the horror of the world.

As a child he was puny and sickly, with every mark of the degenerate ; and every circumstance of his training conspired to develop the defects of mind and body which were his heritage. He could have had no worse guardian than his grandmother, the Archduchess Sophia, who was the custodian of the first nine years of his life. His mother, the beautiful Empress Elizabeth, unable any longer to bear the cruelties and infidelities of her husband, was wandering, a sad exile, over the face of the earth ; and in her absence the Archduchess, who hated her daughter-in-law, not only taught the child

to hate and despise his mother, but seems deliberately and maliciously to have tried to develop all that was bad in him.

When Elizabeth at last returned to Court, eager to take her beloved boy to her heart, he received her advances with scowls and sullen looks ; and instead of flying to her arms, as she had fondly hoped, turned his back on her and ran out of the room to tell his grandmother that the " monster " had returned. It was a heart-breaking task to which the Empress now set herself—that of winning the love and trust of her own son ; but with infinite patience, tenderness and tact she at last succeeded. But more than these, in was his mother's beauty that first won the admiration and then the homage of the boy, to whom the beautiful always made a powerful appeal to his last day.

But though Elizabeth thus won back her son's affection, the evil effects of the Archduchess's training remained ineradicable. The long indulgence of every whim had made him unbearably conceited and autocratic. If his will, however unreasonable, was thwarted he would fly into passions almost insane in their violence, and followed by long periods of sulking. He was swollen with a ridiculous sense of his own dignity as heir to the crown and showed his contempt of all whose blood was not royal like his own.

He was, in fact, at this early age, an impossible

boy, insufferably autocratic, conceited and capricious ; and yet that there remained some germ of good in him many a story proves. Thus, on one occasion, after a more than usually furious exhibition of temper, his mother in despair sat down at the piano and began to sing one of Schubert's songs in her sweet, musical voice. The storm that raged in the boy's breast was lulled as by magic ; and, soon, feeling a little hand on her arm, she looked round to see Rudolf's eyes swimming with tears. " Forgive me, mamma," he said, " I am sorry." " What are you sorry for, Rudy ? " she asked, not feeling quite sure of his penitence. " For what I said. When you sing, you know, I always feel I am getting more good." And thus it always was ; from his fiercest rages Rudolf would pass quickly into a mood of penitence, when the depths of his heart were stirred by an appeal to its passion for the beautiful.

But all a mother's loving care was powerless to undo the harm done by those first nine years of the Archduchess's training in evil ways ; and when, on his sixteenth birthday, Rudolf attained his majority and his independence the Empress looked forward tearfully to the years that were to come, when her son, no longer under control, would be able to indulge his weaknesses and appetites to the full. For a time the army claimed him ; but Rudolf soon wearied of a soldier's life with its rigid discipline

and odious routine, and he quickly made it clear, to his father's intense disappointment, that a soldier he would never be.

Then followed a period of travelling, the results of which he published to the world in two volumes, "Fifteen Days on the Danube" and "A Journey in the East"—volumes which revealed him in a new light as a lover of nature with uncommon powers of observation and description. When his journeyings were over he occupied himself usefully with the production of a monumental work on "The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures," in which he had the assistance of the greatest writers and most learned men of his country.

But such activities as these soon palled. He wearied of the society of authors and savants, and flung himself into dissipation under the guidance of his friend, Count Charles Bonbelles, a man who had nothing to learn from anyone in the ways of vicious pleasure; and his parents watched, in helpless alarm, the downward path of the son each loved so deeply.

It became now a matter not only of policy, but of urgent necessity, to find a suitable wife for the Lothario Prince; and this proved no easy task, for the number of suitable princesses at the time was very small. Thus it was that Rudolf was summoned from his low pursuit of pleasure to go wife-

hunting to the different Courts of Europe. His first journey was to Saxony, to make the acquaintance of the Princess Mathilda ; but the sight of the short, rotund, plain-featured lady, with her atmosphere of piety, was more than sufficient for Rudolf, who turned a disgusted back on Dresden within twenty-four hours of setting foot in it.

His second adventure, to Madrid, was equally fruitless ; for the two unmarried Spanish princesses, the Infanta and Eulalie Francesca, proved as devoid of charm as the Saxon Mathilda—excellent young women no doubt, but almost repellent to a man to whom physical beauty was so necessary. There now only remained the Princess Stephanie, daughter of the Belgian King ; and to Brussels the Prince made his next and last journey of exploration. Here again disillusion met him on the threshold ; for Stephanie proved as little to his taste as the royal ladies of Saxony and Spain. At sixteen the Belgian Princess was a weedy, angular, awkward girl, with red eyelids, colourless lips and nondescript flaxen hair, clumsy in movement and shy and spiritless in manner. That she was quite impossible he quickly decided ; and when he returned to Vienna it was to announce his determination to end his days a bachelor.

This time, however, Francis Joseph put his foot firmly down. His son and heir *must* marry, and Stephanie should be his bride ; and thus one March

day, in 1880, the bells were set a-ringing throughout Austria and Hungary in celebration of the betrothal of the heir to the throne ; and the Emperor was informing deputations of congratulating subjects, " Our son's betrothal fills our heart with a joy which is all the profounder because this is not an act of policy but a true union of loving young hearts. For it is to love and love alone that we must look for the foundation of all married happiness."

That this affected joy of her husband was not shared by the Empress we know from the letters she sent to her " poor dear son," in which she wrote : " It terrifies me to see that you do not understand what frightful misery there is in store for you from this marriage which you are undertaking with such a light heart ; and without the slightest feeling of love to guide you. . . . I cannot but conclude that Stephanie is not at all the wife for you, and can never be so."

But, although the Empress looked forward to the ill-assorted union with such foreboding, and did her utmost to prevent it, all her efforts were futile ; and one May day in 1881 the Belgian Princess made her entry into Austria, to be greeted by her bridegroom at Salzburg, under a triumphal arch bearing the inscription, *Tu felix, Austria, nubes*. At Schonbrunn the Emperor received her, and the same day a grand State ball was given in her honour. A little later Stephanie was making regal progress

through the streets of Vienna, in an Imperial coach of crystal and gold, to the clashing of joybells and thunders of cheers ; and on the following day, the 10th of May, the Empress was kneeling by her husband's side, the tears streaming down her cheeks while the Archbishop of Prague held hands of blessing over the bridal pair.

It was not long before Elizabeth's worst fears had their justification. Before the honeymoon had waned, Rudolf began to realise the fatal mistake he had made. He had no taste, no thought in common with his Belgian bride ; they had not even a common language in which to converse. She had as little sympathy with his talk of literature, science and travel as he with her frivolous chatter of frocks, balls and receptions. The more he tried to entertain his wife, the more petulant and sulky she became, until he was glad to escape from the boredom *à deux* to his chateau at Mayerling, where he had his hunting and his boon companions to make the days pass pleasantly.

Thus from the first the two lives drifted widely apart : Rudolf absorbed in his sport, card-playing and more questionable pleasures ; Stephanie spending her days in pique and jealousy at Vienna, and, on the few occasions of their meeting, welcoming him with reproaches which usually ended in violence and tears. Or, we are told, " she would sulk for days at a time, and steadfastly showed to Rudolf

a sullen, scowling and unfriendly face. . . . To punish her husband, she locked her door against him ; but Rudolf merely smiled and went out deliberately to find pleasanter surroundings."

Strange tales are told of the scenes that took place between the unhappy couple—of the palace corridors echoing with loud imprecations ; of footmen picking up in their rooms the fragments of valuable crockery and trinkets which Stephanie had shattered in her rages. It is perhaps little to be wondered at that Rudolf was driven more and more to find his pleasures elsewhere, in the company of more amiable women who, it is said, were of all ranks, from the wife of a coachman to a Princess of the Blood. Even Stephanie's growing beauty—for within three years of her wedding the awkward, angular girl had developed into a lovely and graceful woman—was powerless to draw him to her turbulent side ; and each new defection on his part made the fire of her jealousy flame more and more fiercely.

When in her rage she informed the Emperor that her husband had the audacity to take another man's wife to a hotel bearing her own name (the "Hotel Stephanie"), Francis Joseph refused to listen to her ; and when she appealed to her father for permission to return to Brussels, all his answer was the curt telegram, "It is your duty to stay with your husband."

Thus baffled she determined, before taking any further step, to get conclusive evidence of her husband's infidelity. She bribed his servants ; employed private inquiry agents to shadow him ; and herself played the spy on his movements. On one occasion, when she heard that he was at the house of a beautiful actress, she drove there in a state carriage, which she left at the door with instructions to the coachman to wait until the Prince was ready to return, thus proclaiming his infidelity to the world and covering him with humiliation. On another occasion she paid a surprise visit to Mayerling, forcing her way to his apartment, from which, after a terrible scene, she was forcibly ejected and the door locked in her face.

Such conduct as this, as was inevitable, had the effect of making Rudolf more and more defiant and reckless. He no longer took any pains to conceal his amours ; he plunged deeper and deeper into dissipation in the lowest of company ; one debauch succeeded another, and Monsieur de Weindel tells us, " the venerable trees of the Prater often saw by night the mad dances of princes, nobles, cabmen and their companions of the other sex, in the most primitive of costumes." Two years of such debauchery, during which time Rudolf rarely went to bed sober, played such havoc with a constitution already sapped by morphia and ether, that he was a physical and moral wreck, ripe for the tragedy

that was so soon to close his misspent and ill-fated life.

Matters were now hurrying swiftly to this last tragic act, the opening scene of which was a " Polish Ball " at which the Crown Prince first set eyes on the fatal beauty of Marie Vetschera, granddaughter of the wealthy Greek financier, Baltazzi. " Tall, slender and willowy, with graceful contours and a beautiful neck, she had a delicate pale amber face, with great dusky, voluptuous eyes, under the night of hair so silky and dark that it looked almost blue in the brilliant light. She had the splendour of twenty-five combined with the spring-like freshness of her eighteen years."

Such was the radiant vision that arrested the eyes of Rudolf as he entered the ballroom on that fateful night in the year 1888, a vision more beautiful, more compelling than any his eyes had ever seen. An introduction by his friend, Prince Philip of Coburg, was an easy matter ; and, during the whole of the evening, the Prince danced exclusively with the new divinity under the blazing eyes of his wife, Stephanie. Other meetings quickly followed, and it was not long before all Vienna knew of the infatuation of the Prince for the Grecian beauty ; and when, a few weeks later, Rudolf went to London for Queen Victoria's Jubilee, Vienna was shocked to learn that the Baroness Marie had gone before to meet him there.

Never was man more hopelessly caught in woman's toils than the Austrian Prince in those of the Greek siren, whose ambition already soared to a crown. She had no difficulty in persuading her lover that a divorce from his shrewish wife was absolutely necessary; and she herself, it is said, dictated the letter he addressed to the Pope with this object. Never was a more fatal or futile letter penned; for it was referred by the Pope to the Archbishop of Vienna, who in turn handed it to the Emperor.

Francis Joseph had had many painful scenes with his unruly son, but none so terrible as that which now followed. When it was concluded, Rudolf "left the room with pale, distorted features and trembling hands and made for his own apartments, staggering like a drunken man. A quarter of an hour later he was found in a dead faint in his study."

Of what took place at this momentous and, as it proved, tragic interview it is probable that nothing certain will ever be known. It is said, although the authority is as doubtful as the probability, that Francis Joseph made the startling revelation to his son that he himself was Marie Vetschera's father, who was thus the sister of her lover. There is doubtless much more truth in the assertion that the Emperor insisted on his son's promise to break off absolutely all relations with his enslaver.

What we do know is that, on the following morning, Rudolf, after cancelling all his engagements for the day and despatching a long letter to Marie Vetschera, was driven by his favourite cabman, Bratfisch, to Mayerling, leaving behind him messages asking his friends, Philip of Coburg and Count Hoyos, to join him there.

What the letter addressed to the Baroness contained we do not know, but we know that on receiving it she hailed a cab, and after calling at a cutler's shop in the Wiedner-Haupt-strasse, to purchase a razor, she followed her lover to Mayerling, where they were shortly joined by Rudolf's boon companions, the Prince and Count Hoyos. The following morning "two dead bodies were found on a disordered bed, Rudolf with his head blown off, Marie Vetschera strangled."

What really happened on that tragic night of 29th January 1889? Professor Hoffmann, Austria's greatest surgeon, gave as his verdict that the Crown Prince had died by his own hand—"having blown his brains out with a sporting rifle." The Crown Princess Stephanie is credited with the belief that he was accidentally murdered by one of several soldiers sent to Mayerling to carry off the Baroness—shot dead in a struggle to rescue her from the hands of her would-be abductors. Theories and descriptions, by the score, of the happenings on that night of mystery have been given to the

world ; but the truth is still veiled by an impenetrable darkness.

Perhaps the most plausible and authoritative account is that given by Monsieur de Weindel, which, he says, was given to him by an Austrian Court official with exclusive sources of information. This account has at least an aspect of strong probability, and, such as it is, I reproduce it.

According, then, to Monsieur de Weindel, the evening was spent by the quartet like any other evening—the men drinking heavily of champagne and spirits until the Prince was led to bed in an advanced state of intoxication. A shooting expedition had been arranged for the following morning ; but when Rudolf's valet, Loschek, knocked at his master's door at half-past five there was no response. Louder knocks were equally ineffective ; and Loschek, fearing at last that something was wrong, summoned Prince Philip and Hoyos, who, after further fruitless calls, burst open the door, to find the two occupants of the room dead—the Prince shockingly mutilated and the bed deluged with blood.

Such was the sight that met the eyes of the Prince's companions. What had preceded this terrible tragedy Monsieur de Weindel explains thus. When Rudolf awoke from the stupor of his intoxication, to find Marie by his side, he realised with horror that he had broken his vow to his father to

have no further relations with the Baroness. He was disgraced as an officer and a gentleman. He must have awakened her to inform her that he was going to leave her, that he would never see her again. Marie Vetschera must have drawn him to herself again, and, finding that he was proof against all her seductions, must have attacked him furiously with the razor which she had bought in Vienna.

“Mad with pain Rudolf threw himself on his mistress and strangled her; then, taking up his sporting rifle and putting a drop of water on the charge to make its explosion more shattering, he put the muzzle to his mouth and blew his head completely to pieces.”

In pity let us draw the curtain over those scenes of anguish when the tragic news was broken to his parents—news which, for one at least, his heart-broken mother, laid her life in ruins, and made the assassin's blow that fell nine years later a welcome release from the burden of a sorrow too great to bear. To-day the body of the ill-fated Rudolf, carried back to Vienna in a plain two-horsed hearse, escorted by half-a-dozen gamekeepers carrying torches, rests among his ancestors in the funeral vault of the Hapsburgs, while the woman whose love crowned his life with tragedy sleeps her last sleep in the Vetschera vault in Bohemia. “The golden gleam of the Imperial crown had never lighted up the black night of her hair.”

CHAPTER X

“ THE SHAVEN ADVENTURESS ”

“ HAD I been a man my temperament would have made me lead a life of licentiousness ; and had I not felt in me the strength to resist the ardour of my nature I should have married. But, by the grace of God, I had the strength to deprive myself of the most legitimate pleasures, and, influenced by my natural aversion to marriage, I remained single.”

Thus naïvely wrote Christina, Queen of Sweden, at a time when every Court in Europe was holding up hands of affected horror at her indecencies and immoralities, and when she was conducting a liaison with Cardinal Azzolino almost under the eyes of the Pope himself.

Not even in the person of Catherine the Great, supreme stateswoman and crowned courtesan, has the world seen a woman so contradictory and inscrutable as this daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, who for half-a-century was the wonder and scandal of Europe, and who has left a memory sullied by unbridled excesses, culminating in one of the most horrible crimes in history. There was little in Christina's heritage to explain the moral obliquity

which marred her life almost to its last day. Her father was one of Sweden's most worthy kings, a man brave in war, skilful in statecraft and finding his chief recreation in his study. Her mother, it is true, was weak and vain, extravagant and addicted to low company ; but no charge has ever been brought against her moral character. Her strange alternations between foolish pleasures and piety punctuated by maudlin tears, however, point to an unbalanced mind, which she probably transmitted to her daughter.

Nor was there anything in Christina's earlier years to suggest the almost insane excesses and eccentricities which were later to scandalise the world. As a child she was a prodigy of learning, only happy in the company of her beloved books, or racing on her pony at breakneck speed across country, with streaming hair, flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. Amazing tales are told of the future Queen's precocity—how, while she was still in short frocks, she could speak half-a-dozen languages, and could write Greek and Latin verses with the skill of a university professor ; how her studies ranged from the stars to abstruse branches of science ; and how she would confound the cleverest men in Sweden by her knowledge of their pet subjects.

Before she had reached young womanhood the fame of her learning drew savants from all parts



Queen Christina.



of Europe to her Court—all of them to echo Descartes’ eulogium: “There is nothing nobler, finer, more god-like and divine than this young girl, who carries the wisdom of Plato on her lips and gifts of gold in her hands.” She was christened the “Muse of the North,” and in her intellectual Court Pascal rubbed shoulders with Labruyère and Ménage, and Hugo Grotius with Salvius Meibon, all equally eager to pay homage to her wonderful gifts.

Such was Sweden’s girl-Queen (who was but a child of six when she came to her queendom) before she had reached woman’s estate, and before the world had any suspicion of the true character which underlay this brilliant exterior of accomplishments. But already she had begun to startle and shock her courtiers by revelations of a very different aspect of her personality. She began to affect man’s attire and show a strong contempt for her own sex. She appeared in the streets of her capital, strutting in a long overcoat, wig and hat, and carrying a sword. She assumed a masculine voice and gait, and “swore like a trooper”; and in short played her masculine rôle so perfectly that, before long, it began to be whispered, “there is nothing of the woman in the Queen save her sex.”

She loved especially to talk to men on subjects which are rarely mentioned between the sexes.

Thus a writer tells us that one of his friends used to entertain her with stories of an unsavoury nature with which she was greatly delighted, and adds, "yet, because there were some of his narrations which did sometimes require more modest expressions than the genuine or natural, chiefly before a royal majesty and in a maid's presence, as she saw him going about his circumlocutions and seeking civil terms, she would boldly speak out the words, though they were never so unseemly, which modesty forbids me to write here."

Nor did she by any means confine such exhibitions to her own Court ; for, we learn, "when she visited Fontainebleau in her half-male attire, she appeared to some of the ladies like a pretty and rather forward boy, who was addicted to swearing ; flung himself into an arm-chair and disposed of his legs in a way that shocked the not very scrupulous dames of the Court." But these same ladies smothered Christina with kisses, which prompted her to say : "What a rage they have for kissing. I verily believe they take me for a gentleman !"

On the rare occasions when she attended church she would use two chairs, one of purple velvet, in which she was seated, and one in front of her, over the back of which she would lean her head or arms, thinking of divers matters ; and if the sermon was too long or too dull she would begin to play with her spaniels, who were always her companions, or

would rattle her fan on the back of the chair before her, as a signal to the preacher to bring his homily to an end.

And with this strange disregard for decency was allied an absolute disregard for her own appearance. Her linen, we learn, was ragged and much torn ; she never combed her hair but once a week, and sometimes left it untouched for a fortnight ; and, as for cleanliness, “ Wash ! ” she once exclaimed ; “ that’s all very well for people who have nothing else to do.”

Her life, in fact, from this early period was one long defiance, not only of convention, but of elementary decency. She exhibited an utter contempt both for her dignity as Queen and the modesty due to her sex ; she was devoid of all sense of morality and revelled in proving it to the world. And as she grew to womanhood her body seems to have assumed a form as grotesque as her mind. “ Her figure,” to quote a contemporary description, penned by no flattering hand, “ is without symmetry ; she is round-shouldered and her hips are out of line with the rest of her body ; she limps and has bad sight ; her laugh is ugly ; her face, when she is amused, wrinkling up like a piece of parchment when thrown on the fire. One breast is much lower than the other, so that the neck on one side seems quite flat. Her mouth is not ugly as long as she is careful not to laugh ;

she neglects her teeth, and it is not pleasant to approach too near her.

“ Her style of dress is as extraordinary as her person ; for, in her wish to make herself conspicuous from the rest of her sex, she wears only short petticoats and a tight-fitting jacket, a man’s hat and collar, or else a handkerchief round her throat like a horseman starting on an expedition . . . in short, to see her going along buttoned up to the chin, in black wig, her short skirt and her humped shoulders, you would take her for a monkey dressed up.”

And yet this woman, with the crooked soul in a crooked body, never had any lack of lovers. Her hand was sought in marriage by many a high-placed lover. Her cousin, Charles Augustus, was, for years, eager to place a wedding ring on her finger ; the kings of Spain and Poland laid their crowns at her feet ; princes from Denmark, margraves from Germany, the Great Elector himself, all came to Sweden to win her hand. But to one and all she turned a cold shoulder. “ Influenced,” as she says, “ by my natural aversion to marriage, I remained single.”

But she was always more complaisant to the lovers who asked nothing of her but her smiles and favours ; and of these she never had any lack, almost to that last day, when, crowned and sceptred and decked in her funeral robes of gold and brocade,

she was laid in her coffin under the shadow of the Vatican.

One of her earliest favourites was Bourdelet, barber's son and quack, a good-looking adventurer whose plausible tongue and captivating manner had carried him successfully through most of the Courts of Europe. When Christina was, as she fancied, brought to death's door by a serious illness, Bourdelet, whose fame as a healer had travelled to Sweden, was summoned to her bedside, and dosed her so effectually with his nostrums that she quickly recovered her health. He had rescued her from the grave, she declared ; and it was not long before gratitude to the worker of such a miracle gave place to affection for the handsomest and most fascinating man she had ever met.

It was Bourdelet, it is said, who bade her leave her books, and, by initiating her into a new life of frivolity and pleasure, started her on the career of profligacy which was to shock Europe. She flung herself into a vortex of gaiety which made the grave professors and men of letters who had hitherto been her favourite companions gasp with amazement ; and when they tried to lead her back to more sedate paths she laughed in their faces, and mockingly invited them to dance with her. Masked balls, banquets, theatricals, midnight revels followed each other in quick succession ; and at each the Queen was the arch-spirit

of gaiety. A fig for learning ; this it was to *live* !

As for Bourdelet, who had introduced her to a world of such unexpected delights, she could not do too much to show her gratitude and her affection. He became her chief counsellor of state as well as director of revels. She showered gifts and honours on him, and frowned severely on his detractors. As for the barber's son, thus raised almost to a throne and assuming airs of arrogance, he was soon the most hated man in Sweden. The nobles detested him for his insufferable patronage ; the doctors, for his cure of the Queen ; the clergy, because of their well-grounded fears that he was tampering with her faith ; and the populace at large for the oppressive taxes which paid for the extravagances he had inaugurated. So bitter at last was the feeling against the upstart favourite that he dared not venture into the streets without an armed escort, for fear of assassination ; and even Christina recognised that she must part with him, if only to save his life. Perhaps she herself had grown weary of his vulgar airs and pretensions and was ready to replace him. She had been heard to admit that he was " eaten up with pride," and that she had only waited to see how far his pretensions would carry him.

And thus we may imagine that it was with a feeling of relief she saw him start, in a royal coach

and with ten thousand livres of her money in his pocket, on his way to France, and the valuable prebendary she had procured for him. A few hours later, chancing to find one of his letters in her pocket, she “ put it to her nose and exclaimed : ‘ How it smells of medicine ’ ; whereupon one of her attendants answered, ‘ It reeks of pestilence,’ and she immediately threw it away unopened.”

Bourdelet thus dismissed, Christina was soon dallying with Pimentel, Spain’s handsome, courtly and crafty ambassador at her Court, who succeeded to Bourdelet’s place, and also to his legacy of hatred ; for after a brief reign Christina was compelled to send him too packing, his departure hastened by the jeering and shouts of glee of a mob of thousands gathered before his house to gloat over his downfall. Before he left, however, the infatuated Queen gave him a superb diamond ring worth fifteen thousand thalers, begging him to keep it in memory of the “ Moorish lady ”—the part she had taken in a ballet on the eve of his departure. She kept him with her, it is said, the whole night until an hour before he began his journey ; and every post brought her a letter from him.

To barber’s son and ambassador succeeded Count Magnus of Gardie, whose youth and good looks, as well as the ardour of his devotion, made him a welcome successor to her middle-aged lovers. She made him privy councillor and steward of her

household, gave him a regal suite of rooms adjoining her own, and raised him to such a pinnacle of power that, for a time, he was king in all but name. And while he was thus high in her favour, her lover in the eyes of the world, she denied that he was more to her than any other of her ministers. "Nothing in the world could be more untrue than that the Count is my favourite," she wrote. "It is all a devised fable. I never had a lover. What lies! Count Magnus has not spent more than two years in all at my Court and has never influenced me as regards either my likes or dislikes."

When the gallant young Condé came on the scene, prince of soldiers and gallants, she picked a quarrel with the Count, called him a "drunkard and a liar" to his face, and sent him in the wake of his predecessors. Thus lover followed lover, each wearying her in turn, until, sick of her queendom and her subjects' importunities that she should marry, she resigned her crown in favour of the cousin whose suit she had so long resisted; and, attired as a man, started on her adventurous tour of Europe, with a retinue of lovers in her train.

Never in the world's history has there been a royal progress so remarkable. Through Denmark, France and Italy she journeyed in a score of disguises, revelling in the adventures which each day brought her. Into the principal towns she made her entry clad in gorgeous apparel and riding

astride, to the plaudits of the thousands gathered to catch a glimpse of Sweden's notorious queen ; and everywhere she would turn her reception into ridicule by making grimaces at obsequious mayors, or interrupting a loyal address with a peal of laughter or a volley of oaths.

At the various courts, where she was received and entertained as a queen, she shocked even the least prudish by her defiance of the most elementary laws of decent behaviour—"swearing like a trooper," as the Grande Demoiselle records, "throwing her legs about, putting first one and then the other over the arms of her chair, or flinging them up on the back of a neighbouring chair and altogether exhibiting them a little too freely."

At Innsbruck she was formally and solemnly admitted into the Catholic Church ; and when, on the evening of the same day, the Archduke, her host, provided a masque for her entertainment, she said to him, with characteristic profanity : " It is but proper that you should entertain me with a comedy to-night, since I amused you with a farce this morning." A little later she was in Rome, turning the heads of the college of cardinals, with one of the greatest of them as her lover. What was the secret of the power she still possessed to fascinate it is impossible to say ; for this is the picture drawn of her by the Grande Demoiselle, who saw her in bed :

“ A tallow candle stood on the table ; a towel twisted round her shaven head served as a nightcap ; her nightgown, which had no collar, was tied by a large knot of flaming yellow ribbon. In this state she was not beautiful.”

It is not possible here to follow the “ shaven adventuress,” as some derisively dubbed her, through her strangely romantic rambles over the face of Europe—hobnobbing with peasants one day, feasting with a king the next, accompanied by her train of lovers, with valets to play the part of lady’s-maids ; dazzling all by her clever tongue, amusing them by her eccentricities and shocking them by her defiance of all decency.

It was at Fontainebleau that her erratic progress came to an abrupt and tragic conclusion, when in the *galerie des cerfs* of the castle, her lover, Monaldeschi, was brutally done to death at her bidding by hired assassins, his shrieks of anguish reaching her ears as she sat gossiping and laughing with her ladies in a neighbouring room. To all his appeals for mercy she had turned a deaf ear. He had betrayed her, she said ; and he must die. Turning to Père Lebel, whom she had summoned to act as confessor to the doomed man, she said : “ I will leave this man with you, father ; prepare him for death and have a care of his soul.”

The news of this crowning infamy sent a thrill of horror through Europe. Christina was branded

“ murderess,” “ an inhuman fiend.” The world that had laughed at her eccentricities, and professed to be shocked at her immorality, was now united in a common loathing of her. For thirty years she lived the life of a pariah, finding her only pleasure in miserable intrigues of state and equally sordid love affairs, until at last death came to her rescue, in Rome, in her sixty-fourth year.

CHAPTER XI

A DAUPHINE OF FRANCE

OF the dauphines of France Marie Antoinette was the most beautiful, as Marie Stuart was the sweetest in disposition ; but neither the Scottish nor the Austrian princess possessed such a combination of good looks, charm, vivacity and winsomeness as made Marie Adélaïde of Savoy the most attractive and lovable of them all.

As a child, at the Court of her father, Victor Amadeus, Duke of Savoy, she won all hearts. " She is," wrote her governess, the Marquise de Saint Germain, to a friend, " the sweetest, merriest, most irresistible little fairy you can picture ; brimful of pranks, always getting into mischief, but so adorable in all her pretty ways that, however naughty she is, it is impossible to be cross with her when she flings her little arms round my neck and simply covers me with kisses." Even the grimmest courtier could not resist a smile and a pat on the cheek, although he knew that the moment his back was turned the little madcap would probably be making faces at him.

If ever a child was born for the joy of life and for conquest it was this fascinating little princess, who

to all her other charms added the promise of a rare loveliness. Read what Louis XIV., her great-uncle, wrote of her to Madame de Maintenon when he first saw her as a child of ten: "She has the best grace and the prettiest figure I have ever seen; eyes very bright and very beautiful, the lashes black and admirable; complexion very even, white and red, all one could wish; the finest blonde hair that was ever seen, and a great mass of it. Her mouth is rosy, the lips full, the teeth white, her hands well made, but the colour of her age."

Such was Marie Adélaïde of Savoy, before even she had reached the threshold of the beauty which was to earn for her the enthusiastic description, "the most beauteous of all the dauphines"—as indeed she was, for Marie Antoinette was not born until nearly sixty years after the Savoy princess wore her wedding veil.

When Marie Adélaïde was born, one December day in 1685, it was no happy home that saw her cradling. Her mother, Anne Marie d'Orleans, niece of the "Sun King," had been sent, a very unwilling bride of fourteen, to the Duke of Savoy as a pledge of his allegiance to France; and from the day of her arrival had been doomed to unhappiness and neglect with a husband who not only treated her with indifference but flaunted in her face his scandalous amours.

Even the coming of the baby princess, although

it brought solace to the mother, only served to widen the gulf between the Duchess and her husband, who felt himself aggrieved that she had not provided an heir to his dukedom. But happily some good fairy had dowered the child with a bright, buoyant nature which the tears and sighs of her unhappy mother and the coldness of a heartless father were powerless to quench.

But Marie Adélaïde was not destined to remain long in the gloomy atmosphere of the Savoy Court. Long before she reached her eleventh birthday her hand was pledged, as a condition in a peace treaty between France and Savoy, to the Duc de Bourgogne, her kinsman, and grandson and second heir to Louis XIV. ; and a few weeks later the Comte de Tessé was sent to Turin to arrange the terms of the nuptials. One can picture the excitement of the child-bride as, peeping through a palace window by her mother's side, she watched the coming of the man who represented her future husband. Then followed days of consultation between her parents and the Comte, who sent long descriptions of his bride-to-be to the Duc de Bourgogne, with a portrait of her specially painted ; and even, so punctiliously did he discharge his mission, sent to Paris one of her bodices and a ribbon giving the measurements of her figure.

" The more I see of the young Princess," he wrote to Louis, " the more I am convinced that she is

strong and has a good constitution. Whenever she sees me she blushes with charming modesty, as if in seeing me she is reminded of the Duc de Bourgogne." So anxious was Marie Adélaïde, child though she was, that the arrangements for her marriage should run smoothly, that, when one day an Austrian diplomatist, the Comte de Mansfeld, arrived at the palace, she exclaimed to her mother : " Mon Dieu ! What has *he* come for ? You will see, father will listen to him, as he always does, and I shall have to marry some horrid Austrian ! He has no business here," she added, stamping her foot. " I wish you would send him away."

But the Comte de Mansfeld had come too late on the scene : the marriage was already arranged and the contract was quickly signed. The Princess was to become the Duc's bride at twelve ; her dowry was to be two hundred thousand crowns ; and Louis XIV. pledged himself to give her fifty thousand crowns' worth of jewels. On her trousseau fifty-four thousand francs were spent, including, it is interesting to note, twenty-four thousand francs for linen and lace ; thirteen thousand for silver and brocade ; nine thousand five hundred for trimmings, and three thousand for embroidered skirts. On 16th September 1696 the wedding contract was signed with impressive ceremonial in the presence of the entire Court. " I wish with all my heart," the Comte de Tessé wrote to Louis,

“that your Majesty could have seen the young Princess making her curtseys and signing boldly, modestly and with dignity.”

In the following month the child-bride, who had still only counted ten summers, said good-bye to her Savoy home, and started on her stately progress to France and her unseen bridegroom—riding in a purple-draped coach drawn by eight horses, and followed by a long procession of gorgeous equipages containing her ladies, her maids of honour, her doctors, and other attendants to the number of six hundred. Arrived by slow stages at Pont-de-Beauvoisin, the Princess was greeted by a brilliant train of officials sent by Louis for her further escort ; and at Montargis Louis himself received the bride.

“Madame,” said Louis, as he advanced to the Princess’s carriage, and, before she had time to alight, took her in his arms and lifted her to the ground, “Madame, I have waited for you with great impatience,” to which Marie Adélaïde replied by kissing the King’s hand and smilingly assuring him that this was the happiest and proudest moment in her life. No wonder Louis was charmed by the grace and courtesy, the mingling of deference and childlike trust with which the little bride gave him greeting, or that he sent such glowing accounts of her to Madame de Maintenon.

“I led her to her room, through the crowd,” he

wrote, "letting her be seen from time to time by holding the torches closer to her face. She bore the march and the lights with grace and modesty. The more I see of the Princess, the more satisfied I am. Her air is noble and her manners polished and agreeable. I have pleasure in telling you so much that is good regarding her ; for I find that, without partiality or flattery, I can do so, and that indeed I am obliged to do so—I forgot to say that I have seen her play at Spilikins in a charming manner ! "

Arrived at last at Fontainebleau, to the welcome of cheering thousands, Marie Adélaïde found herself transported to a Court little less dreary than the one she had left behind her. The first glimpse of her future husband shattered all her rosy dreams ; for in place of the handsome prince she had pictured she saw a dwarfish, humpbacked youth, " with a shocking mouth and a sickly skin," a boy of gloomy moods, shrinking from gaiety and finding a refuge in a morbid piety—a creature altogether repulsive, against whose awkward advances every fibre of her body rebelled. Fortunately this unattractive lover was only permitted by the King to see his future wife once a fortnight.

Nor was this the only disillusion that awaited her. There were no young people at the Court with whom she could romp and play, with the exception of her *fiancé's* brothers, the Ducs of Anjou and

Berri, whom she was only allowed to see once a month. Her very meals were to be eaten in solitary state, and only such ladies as the King approved were permitted even to speak to her. Picture the terrible, soul-crushing isolation of this child of sunshine and gaiety in her new and splendid prison-house, with no distractions beyond her lessons in writing, dancing and harpsichord-playing, varied by occasional visits to the convent school of Saint-Cyr, where, in the regulation costume of long cloak and brown skirt and muslin cap, she was allowed to join the classes of the pupils.

Fortunately she found a kind and sympathetic friend in Madame de Maintenon, the King's homely, middle-aged wife, into whose affections she quickly won her way, and who was devoted to her winsome little charge. "Your Royal Highness," Madame de Maintenon wrote to the Duchess of Savoy, "will scarcely believe how much the King is delighted with her; he told me yesterday he had to restrain his feelings, lest his happiness should appear too excessive. The Princess is polite to a degree that does not allow her to say anything disagreeable. Yesterday I wished to decline her caresses, and push her off by telling her that I was too old; but she assured me, 'Oh, not so old!' When the King left the room she ran to embrace me.

"She then made me sit down and, placing herself

almost on my knees, she said to me, ‘ Mamma has charged me to give you a thousand demonstrations of her friendship, and to beg yours for herself. Pray instruct me well in everything whereby I may please the King.’ Those were her words, madame ; but the gay, the sweet, the graceful air with which they were uttered is not to be expressed in a letter.”

A year of such dull, decorous but not altogether unhappy life, and the little Princess was standing at the altar with her uncouth bridegroom—the bride in wedding array of cloth-of-silver and jewellery of rubies and pearls, the Duc in a gold embroidered suit of black velvet, with a mantle of cloth-of-silver. The wedding ceremony was followed by a state banquet and a display of fireworks, after which an adjournment was made to the apartments of the new Duchesse de Bourgogne, furnished with a splendid new bed, upholstered with green velvet embroidered with gold. At the *coucher*, the King and Queen of England, the principal wedding-guests, were chosen to go through the usual formality of presenting the nuptial night garments. Such was the quaint ceremonial of the time ; but the wedded pair were still, Louis decided, “ too young for love-making ” ; and, the formalities ended, the bride was conducted to her own apartment.

Her new condition brought with it a very

welcome revolution in her life. Louis, whose heart she had completely captured, now abandoned his Puritan habits for her sake. Masquerades, spectacles, operas were now provided in brilliant sequence for her pleasure. Even lotteries with high stakes, and card games, which he had long forsworn, were revived. He lavished costly presents of jewellery on her, and was never happier than when ministering to her amusement or her vanity.

Never did royal court undergo such a transformation. There were balls every day, we are told ; *fête* succeeded *fête*, each eclipsing its predecessor in splendour ; there were state banquets ; masquerades in which the Duchesse appeared, now as Flora, now as a dairymaid, as a Spanish beauty or a Sultana of the East ; suppers at which the revels lasted until dawn ; and nights of wild gambling. And into this vortex of pleasure Marie Adélaïde flung herself with a tireless zest, until Louis, when once he heard that she had spent the night at the card-table with some of the most dissolute of his courtiers, exclaimed in despair : “ Is not a dinner, a cavalcade, a hunt, a collation enough for one day, that she must stay up all night gambling in questionable company ? ”

When she grew a little weary of such dissipations the Duchesse would transfer her irrepressible spirits to Versailles, where she and her ladies would

keep themselves amused by such childish games as blindman's buff and hide-and-seek ; making sugar cakes and improvising banquets ; feeding their birds and pets, riding donkey-races or playing practical jokes on each other. On summer nights " she arranged walks or river-parties. Sometimes she wandered till early morning in the gardens or plantations, never a serious thought entering her pretty head."

And in this programme of dissipation love-making inevitably had a part ; for the Princess, who had her father's hot blood in her veins, was not the one to deny herself this supreme gratification of her vanity, and minister to her pleasure. Among the many lovers drawn to her by her beauty and witchery, the most favoured was undoubtedly the handsome young Marquis de Nangis, a man skilled in all the arts of gallantry and one of the most dangerous Lotharios in France. Stories are told of secret meetings between the Princess and her Marquis lover ; of long moonlight rambles together in the woods of Versailles ; of whisperings heard in remote arbours.

And Nangis had many rivals in the Princess's favour. There was the Marquis de Maulevrier, married to the Comte de Tessé's daughter, a gay cavalier with whom she conducted a flagrant flirtation under the very eyes of the King and her moody husband ; and when Maulevrier was packed

off to Spain by his indignant father-in-law, his place was taken by the witty, good-looking Abbé de Polignac, whose reverend office was no obstacle to such love-making as set every tongue at Court a-wagging. As for Maulevrier, when he returned to France to find himself supplanted, his passion assumed such an extravagant and dangerous form that it was necessary to place him under restraint, until one day, when his keeper's back was turned, he flung himself out of a window and the life was dashed out of him.

But such love adventures as these probably never passed beyond the bounds of the indiscreet ; and Maulevrier's tragic end seems to have cured her of all desire to win the homage of man. To her ill-favoured husband, although love was an impossibility, she at least gave loyalty. She became the mother of three children by him, one of whom lived only a few months ; another, as many years ; while the third succeeded to Louis's crown, a weakling of five, to become one of the most vicious kings France has ever had.

In spite of her feverish pursuit of pleasure and her buoyancy of spirit, Marie Adélaïde knew little of happiness during the remaining years of her short life. The loss of her first-born was a lasting grief to her. A year later she wrote to her grandmother, " If we do not take all the sorrows of this life from God I do not know what would become of us. I

think He wants to draw me to Him by overwhelming me with every sort of grief. My health suffers greatly, but that is the least of my troubles."

Another heavy trouble was the war which broke out between the land of her birth and the land of her adoption ; and to this was added the lovelessness of her wedded life. Even the new dignities which were hers when her husband became Dauphin and next heir to the throne brought her little pleasure, although by Louis' orders she was treated as though she were already Queen of France.

The conviction that she had not long to live became an obsession which filled her days and nights with foreboding. Her taste for frivolity left her ; her gaiety was clouded ; her whole character changed. " Three years before her death," Elizabeth of Bavaria says, " the Dauphine changed greatly for the better. Instead of being utterly intractable she became polite and sensible, wore a dignity suitable to her rank and no longer permitted her ladies to be too familiar, dipping their fingers in her platter, rolling on her bed and suchlike elegant pranks."

Occasionally, however, her old spirit would flash through the gloom of these later years, as when, on one occasion, she began to dance before her ladies and exclaimed, " Ha ! I can't help laughing ! I must have my joke ! I shall be Queen and they will have to reckon with me, for I shall be their

Queen !” But such outbursts were only a hysterical reaction from the gloom that shadowed her last years.

A few months later she was attacked by a virulent form of measles, against which she had not the strength to fight, and after a few days’ illness she died, one February day in 1712. A week later her husband, the Dauphin, and her second child, the Duc de Bretagne, followed her to the grave. “ All is dead here,” wrote Madame de Maintenon, voicing the grief of the Court and the nation. “ Life has fled from us. Our lost Princess was the soul of everything. The Court is as wretched as myself. All is blank and void ; there is no longer any joy or occupation.” The Princess, seductive by virtue of a thousand charms, was dead in the flower of her youth and beauty—she had only seen twenty-six birthdays—and France was left to mourn the most lovable of her dauphines.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAD KING'S BRIDE

ONE day in the year 1770 Caroline Matilda, Queen of Denmark, took a diamond ring from her finger and scratched on a window of her oratory this pathetic prayer, "Lord, grant that others may be great, but keep *me* innocent." The "Queen of Tears," some have called her ; others, with equal truth, have dubbed her the "Queen of Indiscretions," and both descriptions are equally apt, for it was on the tide of tears that she drifted into the indiscretions which sully the memory of one of England's fairest and most beloved princesses.

It was a sad day in 1764 when George III. announced to his sister Matilda that she was affianced to the Crown Prince of Denmark. The Princess, we are told, burst into tears which neither caresses nor scolding could chase away ; for the child (she was only thirteen at the time) shrank, with a foreboding that seemed prophetic, from marriage to a man so far from the home she loved and whom she had never seen. "Why do they want to send me away?" she sobbed, in the arms of her aunt, the Princess Amelia. "I am so happy here—and I am so young."

But at least the fate she dreaded was three years distant—it seemed almost an eternity at thirteen ; and after a few days of weeping she wiped her tears away and faced the distant future with a bright and smiling face. She was ideally happy tending her beloved flowers in her Kew garden, singing in her sweet, clear voice to the accompaniment of the harpsichord, or reciting French and English verses to the admiration of the Court.

Thus two idyllic years passed ; and then, when she had almost forgotten the unseen prince to whom she was pledged, the blow fell. Christian, who had now mounted the throne, was impatient to see his English bride, and declared that he could wait no longer. Matilda's too brief day of youth and happiness was brought to a sudden conclusion ; and one October evening in 1566 she was led to the council chamber in St James's Palace, arrayed in her bridal finery, tears streaming down her white cheeks, to be wedded by proxy to the Danish King.

At dawn on the following morning, in the company of her ladies, weeping like herself, she was carried away to Harwich, on the first stage of her journey to Denmark, as pitiful a bride as ever went to meet an unknown fate ; and a month later she arrived at Roeskild, to be greeted with open arms, and every evidence of pleasure and affection, by her royal husband.

No wonder the girl-queen was delighted and surprised at such a reception. Her fears had pictured a husband cold and unattractive ; the husband who, at sight of her, rushed to embrace her and cover her with kisses was a youth little older than herself, comely to look upon, gallant in bearing and courtly in manner. Her tears and apprehensions had all been needless, after all ; for she could surely find happiness with one so pleasing to the eye, and so obviously in love with her. As for herself she had no lack of charms to hold his affection ; for it is a charming portrait which Reynolds painted of the " English white rose " on the eve of her departure to Denmark—with hair of fine-spun gold, blue eyes sweet and tender, a daintily arched nose, and a complexion of exquisite purity.

But Matilda was not long left to enjoy so fair a dream. Christian VII., it is true, was a well-seeming youth of brave and courtly exterior ; but he was an epileptic, already under the cloud of the madness which was soon to descend on him. From early childhood, too, he had been thrown into the company of low associates, under whose influence he had become little better than a savage. " He used," De Wyzewa tells us, " to amuse himself by throwing boiling hot tea in the faces of the Court ladies, and hiding under the table to pinch their legs ; but he took even more pleasure in

wandering about the streets of Copenhagen at night, breaking windows, assaulting the passers-by and scuffling with the police."

That Matilda's gloomy forebodings were to be justified, she was soon to discover; for almost before Christian's first kisses of welcome were cold on her cheeks he began to treat her with coldness and aversion. On the night of the great wedding ball he invaded her private apartments with a crowd of his boisterous minions, and locked the door when she sought to escape from their coarse jokes and familiarities. And two days later he was warning his courtiers not to marry, "since he had found bachelor life much better fun." At his coronation banquet he was drunk when he took his seat by her side; and when he saw the tears in her eyes he declared aloud that he had no use for a wife who was always weeping.

Thus publicly scorned and insulted, the unhappy Queen was left to her solitude and sorrow, while her husband sought his pleasure in the company of his latest mistress, a buxom, dark-eyed young woman of the people who had been a tailor's seamstress before she caught the vagrant fancy of the King. With "Trouser-Catherina," as this light o' love was familiarly called, he would dance and flirt outrageously under the very eyes of his queen, as a preliminary to sallying forth with his boon companions into the Copenhagen streets, to raid

the houses of his subjects, beat unmercifully any who opposed him, and fling their furniture into the streets. When Matilda became *enceinte*, so far from showing tenderness and sympathy, he jeered at her condition, while setting his companions on to make love to her. And through all this period of cruelty Matilda uttered no word of protest, though her heart was breaking. She submitted meekly to every indignity, and even humbled herself to the extent of asking him to allow her to share his low pleasures.

When, in the spring of 1768, Christian announced his intention of spending a few months in England and France, his queen begged vainly on her knees to be allowed to accompany him. He not only refused her request, with brutal emphasis ; before starting on his journey he dismissed Madame de Plessen, her favourite maid of honour, who was her only comfort, and put in her place the sister of his mistress, a woman as coarse-minded as herself.

Arrived in England, Christian found himself received with a very cold shoulder at his brother-in-law's Court, and with enthusiasm by his capital, which promptly dubbed him the " Rake of the North," made merry over his eccentricities and, while professing to be shocked by his depravity, gave him regal entertainment. As for the King, he was delighted at the sensation he caused in the

country of his queen, and determined to justify his reputation by leaving none of its pleasures untasted. To George's coldness he returned an open contempt ; and when the Dowager Princess of Wales ventured to reproach him for his treatment of her daughter he retorted by inquiring courteously after the health of Lord Bute, her reputed lover.

When at last her husband returned to Copenhagen, in January 1769, Matilda was amazed to find him a completely changed man. At sight of her he embraced her with all the ardour of a lover, tearfully begged her to forgive him for all his unkindness ; and vowed that he loved her passionately, and that his only object henceforth in life would be to make her happy. Nor were his protestations idle words, as she had so much cause to fear ; for such was the strange revolution in Christian's feelings towards his wife—the inexplicable working, probably of his disordered brain—that to his last day he remained the abject slave of the woman he had hitherto so shamefully treated. And this change, by a curious irony of Fate, was destined to be the indirect cause of the tragedy of the “ Queen of Tears.”

Christian's love had come too late to bring any happiness to his outraged wife, who now shrank from the affection which would have been bliss to her but two years earlier ; and the more ardent

her husband's love became, the stronger was the feeling of repulsion that possessed her. To add to the almost horror with which she now regarded him, he had communicated to her a disease acquired on his travels. This was the crowning wrong of a long sequence of cruelties. She refused to nurse herself, declared that she had no desire to live ; and it was only after long weeks of resistance that at last she consented to see the King's favourite physician, whom he had picked up on his journey and installed at his Court.

Thus it was that John Frederick Struensée came to cast his baleful shadow over the life of the unhappy Queen of Denmark, and while wrecking her life to lose his own.

Struensée seems to have been an adventurer from his boyhood, The son of peasant parents, he had early set himself to remove his birth's ignoble bar. Crafty, unprincipled and ingratiating, he had "risen in antechambers, exerting his wits to oblige clients, nobles or rich people, by a thousand and one services more or less dishonourable" ; and when, in process of time, he had been recommended by one of his employers to Christian, on his journey to England, he had been quick to worm himself into the favour of, and gain an ascendancy over, the mad King.

At last, after years of scheming and subservi-

ence, Struensée's foot was on the ladder which should lead him to giddy heights. For long years he had nursed the ambition of playing a big part on the world's stage ; and, years before his opportunity came, he had confided to his brother that one day he would be to a queen what Monaldeschi had been to Christina of Sweden—lover and uncrowned king. And at last the time had come ! He had the equipment, too, to play the rôle ; for, although not handsome, he had a tall, commanding figure, a clever tongue and brain, an insinuating manner and, above all, a magnetic power which few could resist. That he was absolutely heartless, as devoid of pity as of gratitude, Matilda, like his other victims, was soon to prove.

At first, it is said, the Queen regarded her new physician with aversion, avoiding him as far as possible, and when she must see him treating him with marked coldness. When, gradually but surely, she found herself coming under the spell of his strange magnetism, she fought stoutly against his influence, and it was during this period of vain struggle that she scratched her touching prayer on the window of her oratory—"Lord, grant that others may be great, but keep *me* innocent." "Then," says De Wyzewa, "she gave way and yielded herself entirely."

The reason for this surrender by a woman whom no breath of scandal had ever touched before is

not far to seek. It is true that such love as she had for her husband was killed by his cruelty, and that the maudlin sentiment which succeeded only inspired loathing. It is also true that Struensée had much of the physical attraction calculated to appeal to a scorned and ill-used woman who craved affection. But the facts that she showed such a strong aversion to him from the first, and struggled so hard against his influence, lend convincing support to the theory that his ascendancy over her was due neither to affection, nor to the reaction of an unhappy wedded life, but to his power of hypnotism.

That even after her surrender she shrank from him we have abundant evidence. Once when, walking along a corridor of the palace, with her brother-in-law, Prince Charles of Hesse, she saw Struensée coming towards her, she stopped, grew deathly pale, and with a murmured excuse to the Prince ran back to her apartments. When she was seated opposite to him at table her pallor and fits of trembling alarmed all who saw her.

But the spell was much too strong for her to resist. She was soon the veriest puppet in the hands of her strong-willed lover, obeying his lightest word, cowering under his frown, and mute under his bullying and insults. She could not speak or receive a letter without his consent ; nor would he allow her even to see her mother unless

he were present. She was, in fact, dead to mother, brothers and children alike, to all she had ever loved ; “ her beautiful eyes had assumed a vacant stare, a wandering expression which was painful to see ” ; and when she could escape from her tyrant she spent her hours weeping in her room.

As for Struensée, he was quick to reap the fruits of his ascendancy. With the King now hopelessly imbecile, and the Queen the slave of his every caprice, he had no difficulty in raising himself to a position of power. One great office of state after another was his without the asking. He was absolute ruler of Denmark, with full power to do as he would—to rob the Treasury, to give the highest posts in the army and navy to his friends, to make laws at home and direct affairs abroad.

When the great nobles of Denmark declined to come to his Court, their place was taken by the Copenhagen shopkeepers and their wives, who feasted at the royal tables and strutted at receptions in their bourgeois finery, making their genuflexions to the peasant's son who was so much more their king than Christian, the madman. Sometimes, we are told, Christian would make a diverting appearance in this court of shopkeepers, attired in a dressing-gown, and would begin to recite a French poem. When the hilarity of the Court had subsided he would slink back to his

apartments, where his chamberlain, Brandt, would whip him soundly and put him to bed.

But Struensée had one dangerous enemy in Queen Juliana, the King's stepmother, who recognised the coward behind his brave exterior, and realised that it would be no difficult matter to dethrone so shoddy a "king." With the connivance of a few of the braver spirits among the nobles she took advantage of the distraction of a masked ball at the palace to seek an interview with Christian; and, producing a forged letter which revealed a plot of Matilda and Struensée to kill him, wrung from the mad King an order for the arrest of both the Queen and her lover. A few hours later Struensée was arrested in his bed, and was carried off to the citadel, struggling and weeping and crying for mercy; while Matilda was flung into a loathsome cell in Elsinore prison.

Struensée's day of splendour was now ended; his doom was sealed from the moment his cell door closed on him. When he learned that the Queen was also a prisoner, with characteristic cowardice he sought to save himself by denouncing her. He swore that she had been his mistress against his will, that he had struggled in vain against her seductions and appeals, and had only consented when she threatened to kill herself if he resisted any longer. These and other charges equally

grave and false were put into writing, to which he placed his signature.

Thus equipped, the conspirators betook them to the Queen's cell, and demanded to know if her lover's accusations were true. "If they are untrue," they said, "no death is too cruel for a man who has dared to assail your Majesty's good name in such a fashion." It was a terrible predicament for Matilda ; for if she said the charges were false she condemned Struensée to a horrible death. If, on the other hand, she admitted their truth, she condemned herself. "If," she said at last, "I confirm the truth of Struensée's charges, will my confession save his life ?" And when she was assured that, at least, her admission would reduce his punishment, she exclaimed, "Very well, I will sign." Her signature written, the pen dropped from her hands and she fell in a dead faint on the floor of her cell.

But Matilda's self-condemnation was powerless to save Struensée's life ; for after a few days of mock penitence and piety he was publicly degraded and executed, in company with his principal tool, Brandt, the chamberlain—dying with the howls and execrations of the thousands of spectators in his ears. For the unhappy Matilda a less tragic fate was reserved. The intervention of her brother, supported by a threat of war, rescued her at least from the gallows—only,

however, to exchange her cell for confinement in the Castle of Celle, where her equally unhappy grandmother, queen of George I., had been cradled a century earlier.

Here, after three years of true piety and good works, the "Queen of Tears" died, of a fever caught at the bedside of a cottage child, just at the moment when a plot to restore her to her throne was ripe for execution.

CHAPTER XIII

A MARRIAGE THAT FAILED

CRADLED to the rocking of an earthquake, and pursued by portents to the very foot of the altar, Marie Antoinette seemed doomed from her birth to the ill-luck which, as we know, dogged her steps to that last day when "she drank death in a long draught" on her way to the guillotine. When she was little more than a child, her mother, Maria Theresa of Austria, once inquired of a clairvoyant what Fate had in store for her beautiful daughter. The seer turned pale at the inquiry. "Madame," he said, "there are crosses for all shoulders." And to all the Empress's pleadings he would answer no word more.

And yet no royal princess ever seemed more destined to find the cup of life sweet to the taste. From her earliest childhood the joy of living sparkled in her eyes and bubbled at her lips. She was the merriest, most bewitching little madcap that ever made palace corridors ring with laughter, or at the same time shocked and fascinated courtiers by her pranks. She snapped her little fingers at all authority, and danced her wilful and wayward way through girlhood, driving her parents and



Marie Antoinette.

guardians to distraction one moment, the next winning forgiveness by flinging her arms round their necks and the soft pleading of a kiss from her pretty lips.

Even the altar had no power to check her high spirits and her mutinous disregard of all convention. One day, we are told, the fifteen-year-old bride, "riding her donkey, was thrown, with the swirl of petticoats that may be imagined. Lying on her back she laughed aloud. 'Go and call Madame de Noailles,' she cried, 'and ask her the correct etiquette for a princess fallen from a donkey!'" "She loved noise and laughter; she was always surrounded by a lot of yapping little dogs; she invented the silliest schoolgirl pranks—passing like a gleam, like a song, careless of her train and of her ladies, she does not walk—she runs!"

When Mercy Argenteau reproved her for such levity and begged her to remember that she was no longer a child, but a married woman, she laughed gaily in his face. "Married? No, indeed, I am not!" And away she danced to some new escapade or mischief. And thus it was always with the light-hearted princess, snatching every flower of pleasure, dancing, laughing, flirting, even under the scowling eyes of jealousy and hatred, until at last, with eyes of horror, she saw the clouds of doom massed over her head, not knowing in her frivolous innocence how and whence they came.

“ Married ? Indeed I am not ! ” Nor was she, in any proper sense of the word, for never was a more ludicrous parody of a husband than Louis XVI., who led the lovely, laughter-loving Austrian princess to the altar before she had seen her fifteenth birthday. At supper, on his wedding day, the Dauphin, as he then was, was so absorbed in the delicacies of the table that he had not even a glance to spare for the radiant young bride, who was watching him with a look of mingled amusement and disgust. “ Do not overload your stomach to-night,” the King, his grandfather, said to the vivacious bridegroom. “ Why ? ” placidly inquired the Dauphin, as he glanced up from his plate. “ I always sleep well after a good supper.”

And indeed he took good care to sleep well on this his nuptial night ; for, after leading his young wife to her room, he bade her a formal good-night and retired to his bed and his undisturbed slumber. When the Princess de Guéménée presented herself at Marie Antoinette’s apartment the next morning she was frankly amazed to find her alone. “ The Dauphin has already arisen ? ” she inquired, in her surprise. “ Oh no ! ” the bride replied, with a laugh ; “ at least not here. I really believe I have married the most polite man in France. We parted at the door of my apartment last night. He held his hat in his hand, and left me hastily as if I were in his way.”

When the Dauphine met her husband for the first time that day, at luncheon, she asked him, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "Did you sleep well last night?" "Very well indeed, thank you," was the answer. "Why do you ask?"

Such was the husband to whom the loveliest and gayest princess in Europe had given her hand and her liberty—a clown as insensible of her charms and his duty as any clod of earth, with no interest in life apart from his gluttony, his hunting and the workshop over his library, with its forge, anvils and tools. Gamin, who was his tutor in the art of lock-making, says, "He was fond to excess of lock-making, and he concealed himself from the Queen and the Court to file and forge with me. In order to convey his anvil and my own backwards and forwards we were obliged to use a thousand stratagems, the history of which would never end."

And when he was not eating, sleeping or among his tools, he found his chief pleasure in the hunt, with which, says Soulavie, "he was so much occupied that, when I went into his private closets at Versailles, I saw upon the staircase six frames, in which were seen statements of all his hunts when Dauphin and when King. In them was detailed the number, kind and quality of the game he had killed at each hunting-party during every month, every season and every year."

The sixteenth Louis was, in fact, a degenerate, a

shy, morbid, retiring creature, in whom was no trace of manliness, and to whom, unlike his predecessors on the throne, beauty made no appeal. Thus, from his wedding day, the fairest bride in France had no power to wean him from the pleasures of the table or the fascination of his forge.

Picture the early wedded days of the young princess, transported from the love and gaiety of her childhood's home to the deadly monotony of the French Court and to a husband whose indifference to her was inhuman. Here is her normal day's programme as she herself gives it: "I rise at ten o'clock, say my morning prayers and have my breakfast, after which I go to my aunt's, where I generally meet the King. At eleven I have my hair dressed. At twelve the household is summoned. I put on my rouge and wash my hands in the presence of everybody. When this is done the gentlemen leave my room, the ladies alone remain and see me change my dress. At twelve, mass. After dinner I go to the Dauphin's apartments; if he is busy I come back to my room, when I read, write, or do some work.

"At three o'clock I go to my aunt's; at four the Abbé comes to me; at five my music- or my singing-master. From seven to nine we have a game. At nine we have supper; then we wait for the King, who generally puts in an appearance at about a quarter to eleven. As for me, I lie on

a large sofa, where I sleep until his Majesty's arrival. When he does not come we retire at eleven. This is how we spend the day."

As the weary months passed, the continued coldness of the Dauphin became more and more unintelligible to the young wife, on whom her mother had strongly impressed the necessity of providing heirs to the throne, a duty which she was prepared to fulfil ; until in her resentment Marie Antoinette at last summoned up courage to remonstrate with her husband. To her remonstrances the Dauphin announced that " he ignored nothing concerning marriage ; that from the beginning he had made out a plan for himself from which he did not intend to depart. Now that the time had arrived he would live with the Dauphine at Compiègne in the character of husband."

But, although he went to Compiègne, the journey brought no change in his life. Hunting and feasting filled his days ; and his diary recorded alternately his attacks of indigestion and the number of game he killed ; while Marie Antoinette had little to report to her mother beyond such news as this—" My husband had a fit of indigestion, but it did not prevent him going to the hunt " ; or that they still occupied separate apartments, and that the Dauphin was as indifferent to her as ever.

Can one wonder that her proud spirit at last rose in rebellion against such an outrage to every

instinct of the woman in her, or that in her rebellion she began to seek solace and distraction elsewhere. If her husband found no charm in her to lure him from his gluttony and his hunting, his younger brother, the clever, witty, gallant Comte de Provence, was ready enough to take his place at her feet, to pour flatteries into her ears and to keep her amused with stories of Court scandals ; and it was not long before her mother, Maria Theresa, was compelled to write letters of warning against the seductions of the too amorous prince.

When the Comte d'Artois followed in the steps of his brother the Dauphin, and took to himself a wife, matters began to assume a still more serious complexion for the neglected wife, who saw the early prospect of an heir to the throne of whom she would not be the mother. In her anxiety, M. Gaulot tells us, " she tried her utmost to thaw her husband, representing to him the possibility of his brother having a son. ' Do you really love me ? ' he said to her. ' I do,' she replied ; ' you cannot doubt it. I love you sincerely.' She thought he had at last taken a manly resolution. He seemed moved. But it was only for a few seconds ; he soon recovered his usual indifference, telling her that on their return to Versailles he would diet himself, and thought that ' all would be right.' "

The dieting, however, only resulted in more

acute attacks of indigestion, to cure which he flung himself more keenly than ever into manual labour.

“ He worked with the men, helping to move beams, to mix plaster, to remove stones, and would spend hours at such hard work. Sometimes he returned tired out, as if he had been a common workman obliged to toil hard for his daily bread.”

Matters were distinctly growing worse rather than better. Even Maria Theresa, who had set her heart on having a King of France for grandson, was reduced to despair. “ I cannot understand the coldness of the Dauphin, a young husband of twenty,” she wrote, “ for such a good-looking wife. In spite of all the doctors’ statements, my fears concerning the physical constitution of the Prince increase daily. My last hope is in the Emperor. I trust that, during his visit to Marseilles, he will find means to induce this lazy husband to fulfil his duties in a suitable way.”

When, after four years of such loveless wifehood, Louis XV. died and her husband succeeded to the throne, Marie Antoinette forgot for a time her troubles in the joy and pride of being Queen of France. So happy was she that she induced her husband to write a few lines by way of postscript to the letter in which she expressed her delight to her mother. And this is what he wrote: “ I should be very happy to please you and to give you a proof of my love and my gratefulness to you

for having given me your daughter, with whom I am extremely satisfied." To which the disappointed young Queen added, " You see, my dear mamma, by the end of the compliment, that although he is very affectionate to me, he does not spoil me with too much praise ! "

With his accession to the crown Louis XVI. seems at last to have awakened to a more proper sense of his duty as husband. At least he was no longer content, as during the past four years, to say " Good-night " to his Queen at the door of her apartment. But, Gaulot says, " he slept only a little nearer his consort—*voilà tout !* " So little changed were their relations that when one of the Queen's ladies once begged her not to ride too much she answered impatiently, " For goodness sake leave me alone ! You need have no fear that I endanger the heir to the throne."

How remote such a possibility still was is proved by a letter she wrote to the Comte de Rosenberg, after she had been Queen for nearly a year, in which she says : " The King loves nothing beyond hunting and mechanics. You will agree with me that I should look out for a place in a forge. I could not act the part of Vulcan, and that of Venus might displease him much more than would my tastes, of which he does not approve."

Later in the same year, Marie Antoinette wrote to her mother : " The King seems to be kinder and

to trust me more, and I have nothing to be jealous of on that point. But with regard to the important subject—which troubles my dear mamma's fondness, I am very sorry I have nothing new to say ; it is not *I* that am lazy." It should in fairness be said for Louis that however deplorably he failed during these long years to play the rôle of husband, he treated his wife with due courtesy and kindness. As she herself admits, " although he is awkward, he is attentive and as good to me as it is possible to be."

Meanwhile the Dauphine did not allow her husband's indifference to her charms to interfere with the pursuit of pleasure which was to prove so fatal to her. She flung herself with a reckless zest into every indulgence and dissipation. She developed a passion for gambling which quickly degenerated into a vice. On one memorable occasion she played faro during the whole of the night of 30th October (1776) until five o'clock in the morning. After a few hours' rest, she resumed gambling until three o'clock in the morning of All Saints' Day. " The worst of it is," says Mercy, " that All Saints' Day, being a great feast, the people were scandalised."

" The games," he says later, " are sometimes stormy and shameful. They have forced the bankers to reprove violently some of the lady players for their want of honesty. The Queen's

losses at card-playing increase ; her purse is quite empty, so that she cannot pay what she owes, much less give to charities." In January 1777 Mercy helped her to add up the total of her gambling debts. It amounted to four hundred and eighty-nine thousand, two hundred and seventy-two pounds.

And gambling was but one of Marie Antoinette's many indiscretions and follies. In the reaction against the tedium and etiquette of Court life, she would fling aside her royal dignity and, with her ladies, would mingle, "without attendants and dressed up," with the crowds that flocked to the Versailles Gardens to hear the bands play, revelling in her incognito and the adventures it brought. At the horse races, too, her conduct gave occasion for equal scandal. "I went to the course in full dress," says Mercy. "On reaching the royal tent I found there a large table spread with an ample collation, which was, so to speak, fought for by a crowd of young men unfittingly dressed, who made wild confusion and all kinds of unintelligible noises. In the midst of this mob were the Queen, Madame d'Artois, Madame Elizabeth and M. le Comte d'Artois, the last of whom kept running about, betting and complaining whenever he lost, pitiably excited if he won, and rushing among the people outside to encourage his jockeys. He actually presented to the Queen a jockey who had won a race."

It is not perhaps surprising that rumours were set afloat that the Queen sought adventures in these mixed gatherings and even gave rendezvous to men of low station. Such suspicions were in all probability quite groundless, but certainly some support was lent to them by the Queen's flagrant flirtations with her successive lovers, from that handsome, clever-tongued Lothario, Baron de Besenval, who is said to have acquired a fatal ascendancy over her, to the Duc de Coigny and Count Fersen, who was her loyal cavalier to his last tragic hour. To such follies as these she added an almost insane extravagance, which found a hundred vents, from costly gowns and jewels to the fortunes prodigally lavished on her favourites, the Princesse de Lamballe and the Comtesse de Polignac.

Thus the years passed for Marie Antoinette in folly and frivolity, in feverish efforts to escape from the lovelessness of her wedded life. The Comtesse d'Artois had now given birth to the son whose advent the Queen dreaded, and still the clownish Louis remained as little her husband as on her wedding night. But at last a change was to come over the scene with the arrival in Paris of the Emperor Joseph II., Marie Antoinette's brother, whose mission it was to put an end, if possible, to such a deplorable and unnatural state of affairs, and with such diplomacy and delicacy did Joseph discharge his mission that Louis promised to amend

his ways, and even asked his brother-in-law for special advice with this object.

"This man," the Emperor wrote to his mother, "is rather weak, but not a silly fool. He has a good understanding, but is lazy both morally and physically. He talks sensibly, but has no taste for learning, no desire to know. His senses are still undeveloped."

So effective was the "special advice" Joseph was able to give to his lethargic brother-in-law that, shortly after his departure, Marie Antoinette was able to write, "It is said that the Comtesse d'Artois is again to become a mother. It is unpleasant enough for me after seven years of married life ; still, I am not without hopes, as my brother will be able to tell my dear mamma how matters stand. The King and he talked on the subject with unrestrained confidence."

With the King's tardy awakening to his marital responsibilities, his queen appears to have lost much of her former anxiety to play the part of wife. It was, we learn, with something like actual loathing that she suffered his embraces ; and she would spend long nights at the gaming-table in order to escape them. When Mercy ventured to remind her of her duty she would excuse herself by saying, "The King does not really care for my company." In spite, however, of this reluctance Mercy is able, in January 1778, to assure Maria

Theresa that her "daughter continues to behave very properly to the King, who for his own part persists in leading in its truest and most exact meaning the life of a married man."

Before the year came to an end the Austrian Empress was made happy by the news of the birth of a granddaughter, who was to bear her name. "God be thanked!" she wrote in her joy. "May my dear Antoinette be strengthened in her brilliant situation, and give many heirs to France." But still the too-long awaited heir to the throne had not made his appearance; and Maria Theresa's letters to her daughter are full of anxious advice and hopes that she may not have long to wait for his arrival.

"My granddaughter must have a companion," she wrote, in April 1779, "and not wait long for him either." When the Queen received this letter, with its good advice "not to neglect anything you can do to bring this about," she was in little mood to read it patiently. She was suffering from an attack of measles and had for nurses four noblemen, who had her in their charge, only retiring at eleven o'clock each night under strong pressure. "It is easy to realise the sensation caused by this adventure, and the comments which were passed on it. Jokers asked who were the four ladies who would nurse the King in case of his being ill."

Three more children Marie Antoinette bore to

her husband : the long-expected Dauphin (" Chou d'Amour "), who only lived to hear the first rumblings of the Revolution ; a daughter who died in infancy ; and the Duc de Normandie, who became Dauphin on his brother's death in 1789, and who shared his ill-fated mother's captivity in the Temple, and followed her behind the veil less than two years after her still proud head fell under the axe of the guillotine.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST OF THE FAVOURITES

OF all the women who have worn crowns, Catherine II. of Russia was at once the most splendid and the most inscrutable. She was a crowned enigma, as impossible to understand when, to quote the extravagant language of Voltaire, she was the "admiration of the universe" as to-day, when she has been dust for a century. Gifted beyond any other woman of her age, with a brain as strong and shrewd and statesmanlike as that of the great Frederick himself, she was to her last day the frailest of her sex, with a passion for men which shocked Europe in an age of licence. Empress and Delilah, queen and courtesan—such were the widely diverse rôles which filled the life of the "Semiramis of the North" to its close.

If we are to accept Poniatowski's description of her charms it is little wonder that she drew even the most cold-blooded of men to her feet. "With her black hair, she had a dazzling whiteness of skin, a vivid colour, large blue eyes, prominent and eloquent, black and long eyebrows, a Greek nose, a mouth that seemed made for kissing, a slight figure, a noble carriage, and a laugh as merry as the

humour through which she could with ease pass from the most playful and childish amusements to the most fatiguing mathematical calculations."

Even the men who were drawn to her by her gifts of mind were unable to resist the magnetism of her sensual appeal, and were quick to swell the retinue of her lovers. Voltaire's blood was fired to write to her such effusions as this: "Let me, goddess of my soul, celebrate as my weakness can, the divine qualities of your Majesty, and lay on the altar of my heart the offerings of my fervour and love before your divine charms. . . ." And Diderot, in the extravagance of his passion, writes: "Great princess, I kneel at your feet. I reach out my arms to you; I would speak to you, but my soul is overcome, my head turns, my thoughts become confused, I weep like a child."

But while Catherine basked in the homage of such intellectual love, she yearned for a more virile, hot-blooded passion; and she never lacked it. Lover after lover succeeded each other in her arms, with at times bewildering quickness, each different from his fellows, but all alike in their strong physical fascination for the insatiable Empress. Now it is Poniatowski, handsome and graceless, courtier to his finger-tips, who reigns as favourite, until she wearies of him and packs him off to Poland to wear a crown. Now it is Patiomkin, the swarthy gigantic cavalry sergeant, "one-eyed, squinting,



Queen Catherine II.

and knock-kneed," a man "dreadful and repulsive in appearance," who takes her fancy and rules her and her empire, through years of rich harvesting. And now it is Gregory Orlof, the tallest and handsomest man in all Russia, whose good looks and swelling muscles appeal to her passion for a "man," and who reigns for a spell as lover and tyrant, until he in turn is dismissed, loaded with honours and riches.

Thus for forty years the favourites of the hour succeed each other as each takes her volatile fancy—lovers of all types and grades; but all of them possessed of that sex magnetism which to the day of her death she never seemed able, or indeed disposed, to resist. But the king of them all was undoubtedly Patiomkin, the ill-favoured giant, glutton and drunkard and, in his latter years, madman, whom she loved to the last, and whose death plunged her into a grief that nearly ended her own life. "On learning the news," we are told, "she lost consciousness; the blood ran to her head and she was obliged to be bled." To Grimm she wrote in her sorrow: "My pupil, my friend, almost my idol, Prince Patiomkin, of the Taurida, is dead . . . oh, heavens! it is now that I need to be *Madame la Ressource*."

But grief for a lost lover, even Patiomkin, was never long in finding consolation. He himself had provided a sequence of favourites to take his

place when his mistress craved variety ; and after his death there was no lack of eligible candidates to step into his shoes. But Catherine was now growing old, and at last, after forty years of unbridled indulgence, the flames of passion were dying down to the embers. One after another her favourites failed to hold her fickle and sated fancy, and passed quickly into obscurity. Mamonof, the last of Patiomkin's protégés, had been dismissed summarily and in disgrace ; and his successor seemed far to seek.

Then it was that we first hear of Plato Zubof, who was destined to be the last of the long list of men who reigned as Catherine's favourites, and probably the most incomprehensible of them all. A mere boy of twenty-two, young enough to call the Empress grandmother, he seemed to be the last of all the men at the Court to capture her fancy. He is described as " dark, slim, short, like a pretty Frenchman after the style of the Chevalier de Puysegur." And it was this pretty-faced young dandy, this pocket Adonis, with neither brains nor manliness to commend him to the favour of such a fastidious mistress, who was now to occupy the place of such splendid specimens of manhood as Gregory and Alexis Orlof, and a man of such genius for intrigue as Patiomkin. Well might Catherine's courtiers scoff at his pretensions, and laugh in their sleeves at such senile folly on the part of the

Empress, who certainly had as good an eye for a "man" as any woman in Europe. "He is a child, with nice manners, but little wit," Bezborodko wrote to a friend. "I do not think he will hold his place long. However, that does not interest me."

But the Court might rock with laughter and be full of amused and contemptuous whisperings. Catherine was more than content with her boy-lover, who somehow had the power to fan her dying passion into flame again. "I have come back to life," she wrote jubilantly, "like a fly that has been frozen by the cold. . . . Now I am gay and well again."

Her letters were full of her new plaything—his pretty manners, his playful moods, his charming qualities, just as a proud mother might write of her youngest child. Indeed she speaks of her new lover as the "child," when she does not playfully refer to him as "my little Blackie"; and she tells her correspondents how he "cries when he is not allowed to enter my room."

Plato Zubof, unlike some of Catherine's more robust favourites, was at least a gentleman by birth. The son of Alexander Zubof, governor of a province, he was one of four brothers, the eldest of whom was already a major-general, while Plato himself was a subaltern in the Regiment of Guards when the Empress was first attracted by his youthful beauty. But young as he was, and of such "child-

like simplicity," he quickly showed that a scheming, ambitious brain was at work behind his baby face. Patiomkin was still alive ; and, realising that he still held first place in the Empress's affection, he sought to undermine his influence by sending his brother to the army to play the spy, and to " send in reports in which the faults and negligences of the commander-in-chief were brought out in strong relief."

And while he was thus seeking to compass his great rival's downfall, he set to work to squeeze as large a fortune as possible out of the infatuated Catherine. All who sought office or favours from the Empress were glad to make him their intermediary, and his zeal was in proportion to the bribes they were prepared to put into his ever-ready hand.

If he coveted lands, as he always did, the Empress was ever ready, in response to his wheedling, to lavish them on him ; and when coaxing failed he had abundant other artifices to gain his end. Thus, when, in 1791, his mistress was hesitating about buying for him a considerable domain which was in the market, he got scent of the project (Waliszewski tells us), and the following dialogue took place at a state dinner :—" How much does this domain cost ? " " Your Majesty will pardon me, it is already sold." " How long since ? " " This very morning." " To whom ? " " There is the purchaser." And the imperturbable spendthrift

pointed to a young aide-de-camp, a poor young officer who was standing behind his chair. The Empress frowned ; but the trick had succeeded. On that very day a formal contract was drawn up, and the lucky accomplice of this *coup de théâtre* found himself in possession of twelve thousand serfs.

When, after three years of such harvesting, death removed Patiomkin from his path, his progress to wealth was meteoric. One vast estate after another fell into his hands, and the highest honours were his without the asking. Eagles red and black adorned his breast ; he was Count and Prince of the Holy Empire ; and by virtue of his many exalted offices he was Emperor in all but name. When, in 1794, he was Governor-General of New Russia, Count Rastoptshin wrote, " Count Zubof is everything here. There is no limit to his power. It is greater than that which was wielded by Prince Patiomkin. He is as negligent and incapable as ever, though the Empress repeats to one and all that he is the greatest genius Russia has ever seen." In five years he had already reached a dizzier height of power than Patiomkin had attained in a score of years !

And never was man more incompetent or swollen-headed than this spoilt darling of an old woman. When he was Grand Master of Artillery, it is said, he did not know the difference between a field-piece

and a piece of ordnance. "He is not fit to be a subaltern of guards," one of his generals said contemptuously. When he was arbiter of Russia's foreign policy he "acted like a three-year-old child who had been set down to play chess." And, in regard to home affairs, the only monuments of his administration were a demoralised army, an empty treasury and crowded prisons.

But to all her favourite's ludicrous failures Catherine was blind. In her eyes he was a man of consummate genius, the greatest man in her empire, greater than Patiomkin. And she showed her admiration of his genius by lavishing favours not only on him but on all his family. When his brother, Valerian, was wounded in Poland, she made a general of him, sent him a casket containing ten thousand ducats to pay his expenses back to St Petersburg, and provided him with "a Court surgeon, an English carriage, and a hundred horses at every posting station," that the stricken hero (who had exhibited no trace of valour) might travel with every comfort and expedition.

Where the Empress led there was no lack of sycophants to follow. Even in the Senate the empty-headed coxcomb was lauded as the most beneficent genius of his age; and orators and authors vied with each other in hailing a Plato wiser than his great namesake of Athens. "Every day" (to quote Langeron), "from the hour of eight,

his ante-room was thronged with courtiers and generals, ministers and strangers, people with requests to make, people in want of posts and advancement. For the most part they had to wait from four to five hours without being admitted ; and next day they were back again. At last the day of favour arrived ; the folding-doors were thrown open, the crowd rushed in, and the favourite was found seated before a mirror having his hair done, generally with one foot on a chair, or a corner of the toilet-table. The courtiers ranged themselves before him, two or three deep, in the midst of a cloud of powder ; after bowing low they remained silent and motionless. The favourite appeared not to see anyone.

“ He amused himself with unsealing papers, and having them read to him ; and when he addressed anyone, the person spoken to made four or five bows before reaching the toilet-table. The word said, he returned to his place on tiptoe. I am positive there were a great number of people who waited upon him for three years in succession without ever having spoken to him.”

And while the awed, obsequious crowd awaited the coxcomb's condescension, his pet-monkey would leap from head to head, clawing at fore-locks and scratching faces, without a victim daring to raise voice or hand in protest against such painful familiarities, while Zubof rolled with laughter at

his favourite's antics. But Zubof, haughty and insolent as he was, at least received his suppliants in more becoming guise than Patiomkin, who appeared at his audiences, "unwashed and uncombed, wearing a dressing-gown under which were neither trousers nor drawers."

Thus for seven years, until Catherine's death, this last and most contemptible of her favourites was lapped in luxury, waxed fat on her foolish bounty, and was fêted and fawned on by the greatest of her subjects.

When at last Catherine's long orgy of passion and power closed, with her death in November, 1796, Zubof's reign of splendour came to a sudden eclipse, and he ignominiously hid his head under his sister's roof until he could discover what the new sovereign's attitude would be towards his mother's paramour. He had little cause to expect Paul to look at him with a lenient eye ; for even Catherine's son had not escaped the insolence with which the favourite had treated even the highest at the Russian Court.

Picture then his amazement and delight when a Court messenger appeared with the information that the Emperor had ordered a palatial house in St Petersburg to be prepared for the ex-favourite, and, further, proposed to honour him by drinking tea with him there on the morrow. When, the following day, Paul with his Empress presented

themselves at the Morskaia Palace, he was in the most gracious and affable mood, greeting Zubof with the cordiality of a friend and insisting on drinking his health in champagne. As further proof of his Imperial favour, he asked the Empress to preside at the tea-table and play the hostess on such a happy occasion.

But Zubof's delight was of short duration. Before he had ceased to congratulate himself on his good fortune the skilfully masked blow fell. He was stripped of all his offices and vast estates and ordered to leave St Petersburg. His sun had set when it still appeared to be at its zenith ; and the Emperor was avenged. For a time the disgraced favourite wandered on the Continent, seeking to restore his lost fortune by marriage with an heiress. He dallied with the Comtesse de la Roche-Aymon, an exile like himself, until he chanced to meet the two daughters of the Duke of Courland, the most richly dowered princesses in Europe, to one of whom he paid assiduous court. But the Duke, who had Zubof to thank for the loss of his sovereignty, refused point-blank to accept him for son-in-law.

Thus checkmated the knight-errant was planning an elopement, when he was suddenly recalled to Russia to take part in an enterprise after his heart ; and a few weeks later he was in the front rank of the unhappy Paul's assassins. So far,

however, from re-establishing his fortunes, as he had confidently hoped, by this dastardly deed, he found himself in still further disfavour at the Russian Court. The new Emperor, Alexander I., treated him with such marked hostility that once more he was compelled to start on his travels.

At Toeplitz he had an adventure which covered him with ignominy and showed to the world what a poltroon this "hero" of Catherine really was. One day he chanced to meet at Toeplitz the last man on earth he would willingly have faced, the Chevalier de Saxe, a man whom he had vainly tried to assassinate in Russia some years earlier. De Saxe promptly challenged his would-be assassin to a duel, a challenge which Zubof was obliged to accept. When, however, the hour of meeting arrived he refused point-blank to face his adversary, on the plea that he had had no experience with pistols, the weapons chosen by the seconds; and when swords were produced as a substitute he professed to be too ill to fight, and walked ignominiously away to find a friend obliging enough to take his place!

Realising at last that his day was over, he retired to his castle of Shavlé, which alone Paul had been induced to restore to him of all his possessions, and there he spent the last sordid years of his life, gloating over the gold he had rescued from the wreckage of his fortune, and grinding down his

serfs pitilessly. To such a deplorable condition were his slaves reduced, and such were the poverty and destitution of his estate, that the Emperor Alexander gave orders to the governor of the province to "put down the excesses from which the unhappy folk suffered."

Here, remote from the world in which he had cut so splendid a figure, shunned and hated by all, Zubof passed a few miserable years haunted by the spectre of death, in such terror of the approaching end that at the very mention of the word "death" he would shut himself in his room for days, refusing to see or speak to anyone. At fifty he was a decrepit old man, a pathetic wreck of the dandy who had the magic to fan into flame for the last time the passion of an empress.

One more romance, however, awaited him, before the end came. When walking one day in the streets of Wilna his eyes fell on the beautiful daughter of a small landowner in the district. To see her was, to this shattered roué, to long to possess her. Nothing should stand in the way of this last indulgence ; and, the father's consent secured by an enormous bribe, Tekla Walentynowicz became Princess Zubof. A year later death snatched the ex-favourite from his money-bags, and his princess was left a widow, with twenty million roubles, the hoarded treasure of his cellars, to compensate her for twelve months of profound unhappiness.

CHAPTER XV

A QUEEN OF THE PALAIS ROYAL

It was with a sigh of relief that France learned that Louis, the "God-given," was dead. There was no attempt to simulate a grief which none, save perhaps a few of his courtiers, felt ; for he had long outlived the glamour of the days when, not only in his own land, but throughout Europe, he was hailed "Sun-King," the most splendid of all the great ones who wore crowns.

A new generation had sprung up, to whom this period of splendour and power was only a tradition. They had no reason to love, even to respect, the man who was clinging to his sceptre after more than seventy years of sovereignty. He had long passed into the obscurity of Madame de Maintenon's apartments, where he spent his days with his unromantic wife, a woman older than himself, he in one arm-chair, she in another. His Court, from being the most brilliant in Europe, had become the dullest—the laughing-stock of Europe. His country, plunged into disastrous wars, humiliated by one crushing defeat after another, was groaning under an intolerable burden of debt ; and the

populace, made desperate by hunger and poverty, was full of a dangerous unrest.

Now that the King, who was the cause of these accumulated calamities, was dead, France was frankly relieved, even glad. He had worn his crown much too long for his country's good. With a boy-king on the throne, and the gay and gallant Duc d'Orleans as Regent, a new and brighter era would dawn ; and the expectation was more than realised. After a generation of slumber the Court awoke, as by the touch of a magic wand, to a new life more brilliant than any it had known even in the Sun-King's prime. To long faces and hushed voices succeeded the laughter and coquetries of fair women, the fine feathers of love-making gallants, the twinkle of dancing feet in galliard and volta, banquets and midnight suppers—the whole kaleidoscope of a court bent on pleasure.

And the magician who had wrought this revolution was, of course, the Regent, the Duc d'Orleans, that strange jumble of statesmanship and sensuality, gallant soldier and gay Lothario, who knew more of the arts of love and pleasure than any other man in Europe. He it was who set the merry tune to which all France was soon dancing. Not even Rome in her day of decadence could match the midnight revels of which he was the arch-spirit, and of which we have read in an earlier sketch ; and no Court gallant could point to such a list of

conquests, in which a duchess was succeeded by a ballet dancer, and a princess by a *grisette*. Such a mania for pleasure would have been remarkable even in a young man ; but the Duc d'Orleans had long passed the age when youth could have been pleaded in extenuation of his excesses.

“ My son,” his mother, the Princess Palatine, wrote, “ is no longer a boy of twenty ; he is forty-two, and Paris can find no excuse for his pursuit of women, like an impetuous youth, with all the burden of state on his shoulders. It was very different for the late King, who ruled a prosperous kingdom and could well afford to enjoy himself ; but my son must work night and day to repair the ruin wrought by Louis and his ministers. It cannot be denied that Philippe has a great weakness for women. His principal favourite now is a Madame Parabère. She is a daughter of Madame de la Vieuville, who was lady of the bedchamber to the Duchesse de Berry. And it was there that my son first met her. Madame de Parabère is now a widow. She has a fine figure, and is tall and well-made ; her skin is dark and she does not paint ; she has a pretty mouth and beautiful eyes ; she is rather stupid, but is a fine bit of flesh.”

Such is the picture drawn by “ Madame ” of the latest of the long list of women, frail as fair, who had succumbed to her son’s fascinations ; for although the Regent was no Adonis he had in a

marked degree what is more dangerous in the lists of love, a magnetism which few women could resist. From the Duchesse de Fedari to the pretty little actress "La Souris," and from the Comtesse de Sabran to Madame d'Averne, the most cultured of her sex in France, there was probably not one of all his mistresses who did not love Philippe the man, rather than Philippe the Regent.

That Madame de Parabère was beautiful, even her lover's mother is obliged, however grudgingly, to admit; and to her physical charms, so baldly catalogued, of a fine figure, pretty mouth and beautiful eyes—a catalogue which does no justice to one of the loveliest and most graceful women of her day—were added a sparkling wit, a nature of singular sweetness, and an irresistible gaiety of spirit. "Madame de Parabère," a chronicler of the time says, "was incomparably the most seductive woman I have known, irresistible from her wonderful eyes, which could change in an instant from a melting tenderness to a flash of flame, to the silvery laughter that was always bubbling from her pretty lips."

Born in 1693, Madame de Parabère had through her father a long line of noble Breton ancestors, one of whom had come to Paris in the retinue of Queen Anne, two centuries before her birth; and for mother a niece of the Duc d'Argenson. It was, however, to her mother that she owed alike the

heritage of beauty and the love of gallantry which justified the name "Magdalene" given to her at the baptismal font. As a child, Mademoiselle de Vieuville gave promise of a rare loveliness ; and before she had emerged from short frocks she had her court of lovers, each in turn driven to distraction by her coqueties. Even in these early years, we are told, she exhibited the passion for jewels and for gorgeous attire which she carried almost to the grave.

At eighteen Mademoiselle made her début at Court, to dazzle all eyes by her radiant young beauty, and to set the heart of every gallant beating by the flash of her eyes, the superb grace of every movement, or the seduction of her smile. Madame de Maintenon took the girl to her heart ; even Louis relaxed into approving smiles under the magic of her winsomeness ; and it was not long before a husband was found for the débutante in Jean César de Beaudeant, Comte de Parabère.

So far, in spite of her coqueties and frivolities, no breath of scandal had sought to soil her fair fame. But before she had worn her wedding ring many months her flirtations gave cause for many a mysterious whispering and covertly pointed finger. That she had little love for the husband who had given her his name is more than probable ; at any rate, such love as she had proved no barrier to an outrageous flirtation with my Lord Bolingbroke,

the handsome rake who was England's ambassador in Paris, and who seems to have been at least as skilled in gallantry as in diplomacy.

"Love," the newly made bride wrote at the time, "is the only thing in life worth living for ; and it shall not be my fault if I do not have my fill of it." And certainly, if she failed, the fault was not hers ; for no sooner was Bolingbroke's back turned than his place was taken by Marshal de Montluzon, an officer of the Guards, the greatest roué in Louis' army. And when Montluzon in turn was called from her arms, they were quick to find a successor still more welcome—none other than the Regent himself.

It seems probable that the Duc d'Orleans had known Madame for some time before he offered his love. He may even have known her as a child, for in those days he had, it is said, been more than kind to Madame de Vieuville, her mother, in whose giddy steps her daughter was now so lightheartedly following. But the Regent was never a man to force his affection on any woman, however fair, as his chivalrous treatment of Aissé, the beautiful Circassian, proves. He could afford to wait until his advances were acceptable, and he seldom had to wait long ; for few could long resist the most fascinating man in France.

It is thus fairly clear that Madame de Parabère was by no means an unwilling victim. She

thirsted for love, and love she must have at any cost. "Eternity is only in heaven," she once said; "the earth is turning and we must turn with it." Her mother had now turned to a tardy piety; but she had had her day, and her daughter meant to have hers. And thus it was that, when her second lover, Montluzon, was no longer available, she transferred her facile affections to a still more desirable successor.

Madame's liaisons were now the common knowledge of the Court, and it was thus unlikely that her husband should be ignorant of them. It is true that in those days fidelity to the marriage vows was not considered "good tone"; it was all very well for the bourgeoisie, but among the nobility it was little less than an indecency. M. de Parabère, however, was bourgeois in his view of the marriage tie, and his jealousy was a constant thorn in Madame's bed of roses. Fortunately for her, he was a man whom it was no difficult matter to hoodwink, as the following amusing story shows:—

One day, in the first flush of his devotion, the Regent presented Madame de Parabère with a diamond, said to be worth two thousand golden louis. Madame was delighted with such a regal gift; but—the horrible thought assailed her—how could she account to her husband for the possession of so valuable a piece of jewellery? Her quick wits, however, were not long in solving the problem;

and this is how she did it. "My dear," she said to the Comte, with an air of innocence calculated to disarm the most morbid suspicion, "a friend of mine who is in want of ready money has offered me this beautiful ring for a ridiculous sum—a thousand louis only! Don't you think it would be a pity to miss such an excellent opportunity? I should love to have it," she added, in a tone of irresistible coaxing. The unsuspecting husband fell promptly into the trap, produced the thousand louis and gallantly declared that it was a pleasure to purchase happiness so cheaply for such a charming wife. Madame thanked him effusively for his generosity, pocketed the money; and proudly displayed the ring to her friends as the gift of her indulgent husband!

But the possession of a wife at once so charming and so false brought so little happiness to the Comte that, becoming more and more a prey to jealousy, only too well founded, he plunged into dissipation, and, it is said, drank himself to death—an event which his widow promptly celebrated by a supper-party, at which she was the ringleader of gaiety. Her husband thus conveniently removed from her path, the Comtesse was free to indulge her appetite for adventure without restraint, a freedom of which she took full advantage. "Never," we are told, "was she without a lover; the moment she wearied of one she installed another in his place, and to each

in turn she seemed as devoted as if he had never had a rival. She saw everything through his eyes ; shared his views, friends and tastes as if he had not had a predecessor."

But although her lovers thus followed each other in unbroken sequence she retained her affection for the Regent, in spite of long periods of neglect and the claims of newer rivals ; and to Madame de Parabère the Duc was probably more loyal than to any of his long list of mistresses. The reason perhaps is not far to seek ; for, although no more beautiful than some of her rivals, she was the least grasping. She loved him for himself, and wanted neither gold nor favours from him. She never trespassed on the hours which he rigidly devoted every day to affairs of state, and in these affairs she never interfered.

Never was man more addicted to pleasure than the Duc d'Orleans ; but he was at least equally devoted to the duties of his high position as ruler of France ; and neither devotion was allowed to interfere with the other. At the Tuileries his minions and his mistresses found no welcome ; at the Palais Royal, where from six o'clock every evening they shared his revels, no word of state matters was permitted under pain of his displeasure. And it was to her observance of this line of demarcation between pleasure and duty that Madame de Parabère owed her long tenure of the Regent's

affection and her influence over him. How great this influence was is illustrated by the following story.

When the rascally Dubois, who had been the Duc's tutor, and who had, with such diabolical success, initiated him into every form of vice, was to be consecrated Archbishop of Cambrai, he was naturally anxious that his old pupil, now the greatest man in France, should be present at the ceremony. The Duc de Saint-Simon, however, was determined to thwart Dubois in this ambition, and pleaded so eloquently to the Duc, pointing out the public odium and contempt he would incur by assisting at such a mockery of the Deity, that he gave his promise to stay away.

But Madame de Parabère had her reasons for wishing the Regent to be present at the ceremony, and told him in no ambiguous words that he "must go." "But why?" demanded the Duc. "Because I wish it." "And why do you wish it?" "Well," said Madame the Marquise (as she had now become), "I will tell you. The Archbishop and I have had a quarrel; and if you are not present at his consecration ceremony he will conclude that it is I who have kept you away. He will thus become my enemy, and try to harm me in a hundred ways. One thing he will certainly do: he will part me from you; and that would be worse than death." In the face of such pretty

pleading and argument what could the Regent do but go? He went, as Madame said he must; and thus Madame won the gratitude of the most dangerous man in France.

But Philippe of Orleans, long as he remained loyal to de Parabère's widow, was to abandon her as he had abandoned every other woman who smiled on him; and Madame was wise enough to accept her fate gracefully. She even anticipated it, for "in 1721," Marais tells us, "she already refused to see the Regent because he was in the habit of frequenting the society of opera-dancers."

The final moment of parting, however, came when she penned this dignified and touching letter: "Instead of waiting until you send me into exile, I shall go of my own free will. It is folly to drain the cup to its last drop, for that drop so often proves to be a tear of blood. Henceforth I live only for God. I am leaving your world for ever, and we shall only meet again beyond the grave." This farewell sent, she retired to the home of her wedded life, the Chateau de St Héraye, where for a few years she oscillated between piety and dalliance with her old lover, Montluzon, the guardsman, who, after years of hiding from justice (the result of a fatal duel fought for her), reappeared to fan the embers of her old passion into flame.

Thus, alternately sinning and praying, grotesquely combining paternosters with love-

making, this strange woman spent the last years of her life, far from the scenes of her old triumphs and splendour, trusting, for the mercy of the God she had neglected, to the Magdalene's plea, *quia multum amavit*.

CHAPTER XVI

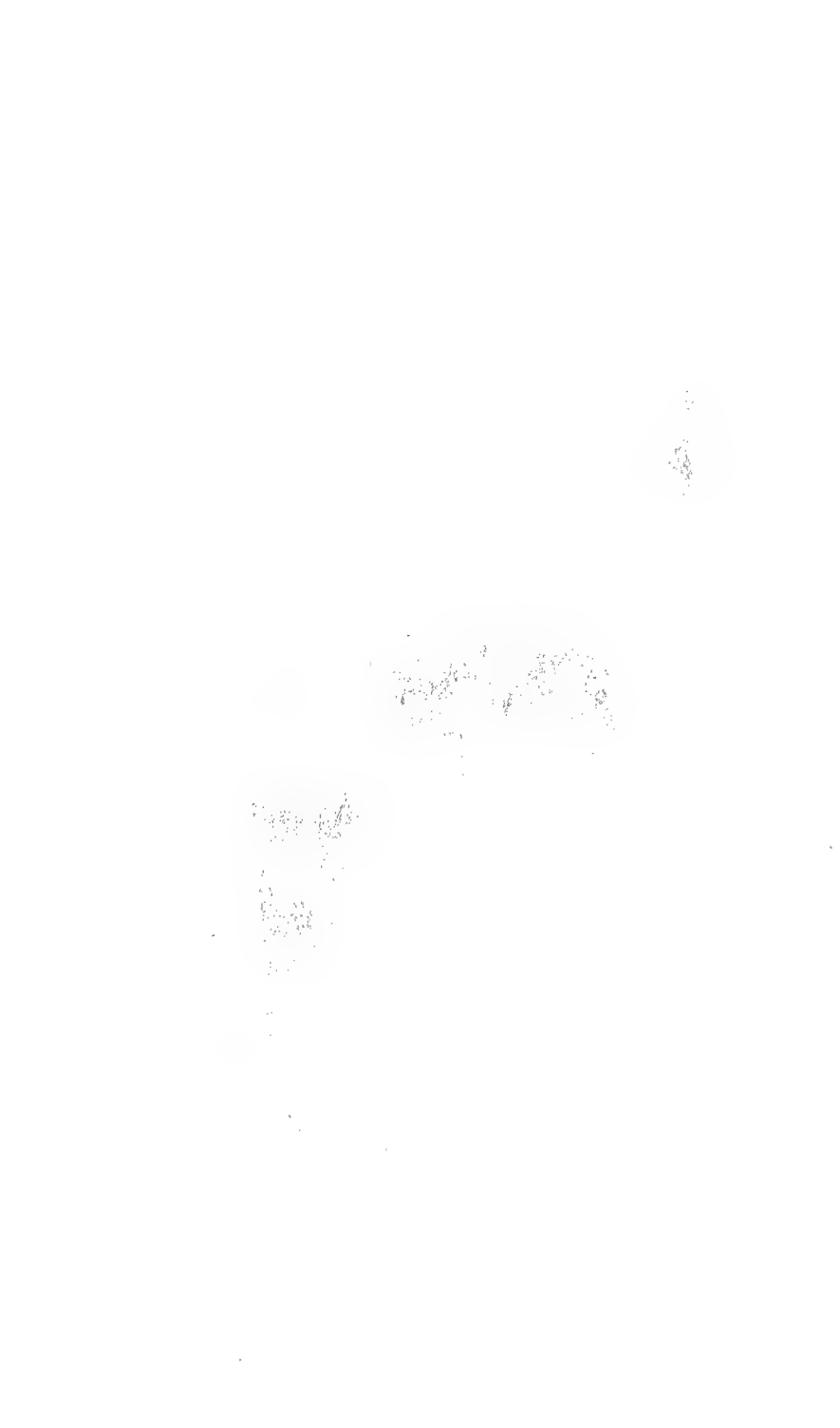
DIANE THE "SORCERESS"

FOR thirty years France was under the spell of the "goddess Diana"; the crescent moon, her symbol, was everywhere, chiselled in marble, or flaunting in gold; the fame of her palaces, their splendid architecture and priceless furnishing, travelled over the world; and her praises were sung in a dozen languages. For twelve of these years she was the ruler of France, supreme in power as in charm; and she carried her splendours and her witcheries into the sixties, until the splinter of a shattered lance hurled her from her throne, when it pierced the brain of the King who, to his last day, was her idolater.

Diane de Poitiers, the woman whose very name still exhales the "perfume of beauty, of aristocracy and of power" three centuries and more after she was dust, was cradled one September day in the year 1499, in the heart of that age of chivalry which her ancestors had done so much to adorn. She had for father Jehan de Poitiers, Sire de St Villier, one of a long line of doughty French chevaliers, skilled in war and in the tourney; and for mother Jehanne de Baternay, daughter of a house no less noble and distinguished.



Diane de Poitiers.



She was thus herself a flower of chivalry, born to inspire brave deeds under the stimulus of her bright eyes. Had she been son and not daughter of Sire Jehan she would beyond doubt have shone in that brilliant galaxy of French knights of which Bayard and Gaston de Foix, de Montmorency and the Seigneur de la Palisse were such brilliant ornaments ; and her fame would have come down to us in many a story of prowess against Spaniard, Genoese or German. But though she was born to a very different sphere of enterprise, there were few manly sports in which she could not, even as a child, hold her own with the "stronger sex."

At six she could swim and ride and shoot an arrow with a skill that amazed all who knew her ; at ten she was among the first of the " field " in hunting the deer and wild boar ; and she was but ten when her hand was promised in marriage to Louis de Brezé, Grand Sénéchal of Normandy, a man as old as her father, hunchbacked, and of surpassing ugliness. Diane may well have shed tears at being snatched so young from the pleasures of her childhood to be the bride of the " ugliest man in France," a man from whom she fled in fright at the first sight of him.

But the Sire de St Villier was inexorable. It was a great match for his daughter ; and in those days no sentiment was allowed to interfere with nuptial contracts. Thus it was that when Diane had

barely seen her fifteenth birthday she was installed in Normandy as Grande Sénéschale, where she spent nine unhappy years, and presented her lord with two daughters. Then came a change which wrought a transformation in her life, when Louise of Savoy, mother of François I., struck by her beauty and character, invited the Sénéchal's wife to accompany her to the French Court.

No change could have been more welcome to Diane than that which took her from the humdrum life of her Normandy castle and the company of her churlish, ill-favoured husband to the most brilliant Court in Europe—a Court, moreover, in which she breathed the atmosphere of chivalry so dear to her. She was at last ideally happy in her new environment of fair women, among whom she was the fairest, and of brave men, eager to dare anything in return for the guerdon of a smile. Dancing and banqueting, jousting and hunting, made the days pass all too quickly for the emancipated Diane, who had left her husband behind in distant Normandy; and if to such delights she added coquetry, who shall blame her the first and long-delayed fruits of her heritage of charm?

Was Diane really beautiful, is a question to which conflicting answers were given in her own day; and which it is naturally less easy to decide in ours. Certainly she is very fair to look upon in a portrait which may be seen to-day in Florence, "robed in

rose-coloured satin, sewn with pearls, a black train streaming behind, a great jewel glowing at her breast." When it was painted she was a woman of thirty, in the maturity of her charms ; and yet the face falls short of the standard of beauty. The fine dark eyes are a little hard and calculating ; the lips are too close pressed—"they are lips for commands and caprices rather than for caressing words" ; and the cheek-bones are too pronounced. The complexion, however, is brilliant in the extreme ; the figure is opulent, and the dominant impression is that of a striking, handsome (rather than lovely) woman of abounding health and vitality.

Such was Diane in her prime, and such she remained almost to the last, carrying her exquisite complexion, bright eyes, and a face without a wrinkle, into old age, long after the more ephemeral charms of women young enough to be her daughters had faded. The secret of her perennial youth was no doubt in the life she led. At five o'clock, winter and summer alike, she took the cold bath about which so many strange stories were told by her rivals, to whom baths were a very rare indulgence. It was even said that she mingled gold flakes with the water.

Long before other Court ladies were awake, Diane was hunting, or galloping across country, with cheeks aflame and eyes sparkling ; and after two or three hours of such vigorous exercise she returned

to her bed, to spend the rest of the morning in the company of her beloved books, which ranged from romances of chivalry to treatises on astronomy. Her meals, too, were almost Spartan in their simplicity ; and thus it was that she retained her youthfulness, and kept envious Time at arm's length.

When romance had fled from many women younger than herself, it had still to come to Diane, and it came at last in unromantic guise. After the Peace of Cambrai, France learned with joy that the two young sons of her King were to be released from their durance in Spain, where, at the bidding of the Emperor Charles V., they had been long detained as hostages for their father's good behaviour ; and when Francis went in state to meet his boys at Bayonne, Diane was among the many courtiers who swelled his retinue. There was double reason for rejoicing ; for not only were the young princes to be restored to the land of their birth ; the King, their father, was to marry the sister of the Emperor who had so long been his enemy, and peace was at last assured to France.

Arrived at Bayonne, none gave a warmer welcome to the exiled boys than the Grande Sénéschale, who, at sight of the younger, Henry, Duke of Orleans, took him in her arms as a mother welcoming a long-lost child. He was then but a boy of eleven, young enough to be the son of Diane, who

was twenty years his senior ; but, great as was the disparity of years, that first warm embrace sealed a mutual love, which was to last as long as life itself. Diane was drawn irresistibly to the shy, proud boy who during his short life had known so little love ; and he, in turn, was irresistibly drawn to the woman who took him so spontaneously to her heart. And when, a little later, Henry couched his first lance in the joust, a child pitted against a man, it was Diane's colours he wore, and it was her bright eyes that nerved his arm.

From this first meeting there was no woman in all the world for the King's younger son save Diane, the mother of a child older than himself. The Court scoffed at his infatuation. It was unnatural—it was witchcraft, nothing else ! But to the voice of scandal and derision both were equally indifferent.

That Diane had enemies at the Court of France was inevitable to a woman who had such a power to charm and to rule, and these enemies now began, under such encouragement, to unmask themselves. The Court was, in fact, divided into two hostile parties—one, the champions of the old order of things, chivalry and the Catholic faith ; the other with strong leanings towards Calvinism, and the reaction it brought with it. Of the latter, the Duchesse d'Étampes, the King's powerful mistress, was the arch-spirit ; the Grande Sénéschale, of

the former ; and to this religious feud was added the mutual jealousy of the two women, each aspiring to be Queen of the Court. Moreover, Marguerite de Valois, the King's sister, was no lover of the S^{én}eschal's lady ; the Queen treated her with marked aversion, and Francis himself regarded her as " dangerous."

Of the jealousies of these rival ladies of the French Court many entertaining stories are told. The Duchesse d'Étampes had a powerful and offensive weapon in the Grande S^{én}eschale's age, which she never scrupled to use. Once, it is said, she exclaimed aloud in Diane's hearing, " I was *born* the very day on which Madame la S^{én}eschale was married !"—an insult which Diane never forgot, and for which she took sweet revenge in later years. In order further to exasperate her rival, the Duchesse encouraged the Court poet, Clément Marot, to write scathing verses, ridiculing her false hair, her false teeth, her rouge and her antiquated coquetries—calumnies all ; but none the less annoying. But Diane had stout friends—the Comtes de Guise, de Montmorency, and many another prince of the chivalry she adored, all ready to fight her battles to the death.

The year 1533 brought a revolution in Diane's life. Her husband left her a widow ; her boy-lover became heir to the throne on the death of his brother, the Dauphin ; and in the same year a wife

was provided for him—at fourteen ! The Grande Sénéschale was now free to defy the world, and from this time she openly adopted the new Dauphin's colours of black and white ; while he wore her monogram blended with his own.

This strange union between the youthful prince and the woman twenty years his senior, however incongruous it may seem, was in many ways ideal. He was shy, silent, morose, a moral weakling ; she was strong, bright, a woman of decided character and views, born to command. She was thus able to supply the very qualities that he lacked. " He leant on her absolutely," we are told. " He made no decision, even in public, without first consulting her ; and in everything she guided him by her wisdom and knowledge of the world." " She made him a lover, a poet, and a king." Above all, she made a man of him.

And apart from this moral helplessness, which called for her strength, there was much in the new Dauphin that appealed powerfully to Diane. If he was a moral coward, he was physically a youth of many qualities. Although not handsome—his nose was too large, his mouth too weak—he was well formed for all manly exercises, with a well-knit figure, " all made of muscle." He excelled in horsemanship ; he was skilled in the use of arms, and had few rivals in any sport from hunting to skating. He was one of the most daring and clever

jousters of his time ; and, perhaps curiously, he was an absolute stranger to physical fear.

That he had a wife mattered nothing to his infatuation for Diane, which grew with his years ; and from her wedding day Catherine de Medicis was condemned to look on while her husband took all his affection to her rival. That her pride was wounded, her heart outraged, was inevitable ; but to the world she presented a smiling face, an object of gentleness and patience. And, while she found sympathy everywhere, from the King, whose heart she had completely won, to the Duchesse d'Étampes who hated Diane even more than she did, she was content to wait her time for the revenge she secretly cherished.

Even the solace of children was denied her ; for ten years passed before Catherine saw her first infant in its cradle. The “ middle-aged woman,” as she called Diane, who was now forty-four, still kept her husband from her side, as she had done on her very wedding night. Then, at last, this compensation was hers—the gracious concession of her rival ; and within the next dozen years she bore ten sons and daughters to her husband.

In 1547 Francis died, and Henry at last came to his crown. Diane, who had meanwhile blossomed into the Duchesse de Valentinois, was now queen in all but name ; and the very first act of her queendom was to send the hated Duchesse

d'Étampes into exile. She had waited long for her revenge ; but it had come at last, as she meant it to come—and it was very sweet. And now Diane's full power was felt. The whole Court was remodelled ; every high office was filled with her friends ; the Catholic faith was supreme, and the Calvinists were trembling for their very lives. At her instigation Henry took a vow to exterminate all Huguenots ; and Diane had the satisfaction of watching by his side many a heretic writhing at the stake.

She had now reached the zenith of her magnificence. The King was more than ever her slave ; his courtiers were her creatures ; the royal exchequer was hers to use as she would ; and how she plundered it the world soon knew. All her long-cherished dreams of splendour were now realised. The greatest architects were set to work to design for her palaces of surpassing magnificence or fairy-like beauty, and every corner of Europe was ransacked for their sumptuous furnishing.

Bernard Palissy produced for her his most exquisite pottery ; the Limousin brothers their most wonderful enamels. Sculptors vied with each other to fashion poems in marble ; and painters to adorn her ceilings and walls with miracles of art. Her gardens were fit haunts for fairies ; and the light poured in floods of glory through stained glass designed by Cousin. And all her environment

was on a similar sumptuous scale, from her hunting-parties and stables to her banquets and fêtes.

“ Her beautiful palaces rose up everywhere. Amboise, ‘supreme in the list of perched palaces’ ; Chenonceaux, like a miniature Venice, with its lakes and ponds where stately swans swam, and carp with gold collars—a love gift from Henry to his ‘only princess’ ; Blois, ‘flowering, laughing, living’ ; Chambord, immense, yet so light and graceful with its spiral staircase and its square pavilions ”—and, above all, Anet, lovely as a palace of dreams with its marvels of Oriental carpets and Venetian mirrors ; its furniture of ebony and ivory and gold ; its statues, its painting, pottery and enamels. And everywhere the golden crescents of Diane, and the twin letters D and H interlaced, as a symbol for all time of the love that linked Diane and Henry.

And all these regal possessions she owed to the infatuation of the man to whom she was always a divinity rather than a mortal woman, and who idolised her at sixty more than when she was in the very prime of womanhood. All he lived for was to be loved by her to the last ; and there is pathos, as well as a deep sincerity, in his pleading, “ Never forget him who has never loved, nor ever will love, anyone but thee,” and “ I count life’s richest gifts as baubles in comparison with thy love.”

Diane would have been less than woman if she had made no return for such devotion. She never wearied in her efforts to brighten his life and to spur his feeble energy of will. "She amused as well as dazzled him; she was not content with making him fall in love, she plunged him in a perpetual state of ecstasy." But while thus rewarding his idolatry she lost no opportunity of filling her extravagant purse. She levied taxes, imposed fines and extorted costly gifts. She dispensed high offices at Court, in the Church and the army to the highest bidders; and she took a liberal portion of any spoil that was going. Thus there was no prodigality in which her greedy exchequer did not allow her to indulge.

The Queen herself was one of her subjects—to such an extent that it was not she but Diane who chose the nurses of her children, and prescribed how they should be fed, doctored and educated; and Catherine, still long-suffering and waiting, allowed her husband's friend to rule even over the nursery, and accepted her husband's attentions when Diane chose to spare him.

Thus for twelve years—and then the end came suddenly and tragically. In June 1559 Paris was *en fête* for the nuptials of Henry's daughter to the King of Spain, and flocked in her thousands to a regal tourney held in their honour. Catherine pleaded in vain to the King that he should not

enter the lists, for an astrologer had warned her that he would be killed. But Henry laughed aloud at such gloomy augury ; for he knew that he was a match for the doughtiest knight in his kingdom.

The first day passed, and the second, each adding laurels to the victorious King. On the third day a Scottish cavalier, Montgomery, had beaten all his adversaries. The supreme moment had arrived when Henry could show his subjects that there was one man in France who could make even the gigantic Scotsman bite the dust. Once more the trumpets rang out for the last joust of the day ; the rival champions thundered down on each other, met with the crash of steel, and passed. A moment later a cry of horror rose from the onlookers : the King was reeling in his saddle ; he fell to the ground. A splinter from the Scotsman's shivered lance had entered his eye, and found a lodging in his brain. Eleven days he lingered in agony ; and on 10th July he was dead. The astrologer's prophecy had come to its terrible fulfilment.

With the death of her lover, Diane's day of splendour closed. Catherine's hour had arrived, and her first act of emancipation was to order her supplanter to leave Paris, and to strip her of her possessions—all but her palace of Anet, which was inalienably her own. To Anet she retired to hide

her grief and her humiliation ; and here, less than seven years later, she was followed to her last resting-place by a " hundred poor persons dressed in white, bearing torches, and muttering prayers for ' Diane de Poitiers.' "

CHAPTER XVII

A FAIR TRAGÉDIENNE

No lover of any age presents quite so difficult a problem to our own as the first Napoleon, so conflicting are contemporary records. If we are to believe Stendhal, for example, his attitude towards his favourites was little removed from that of a savage. "He made them writhe beneath the lash of his contempt"; his method of love-making was almost brutal; he regarded them as the playthings of an hour, to be enjoyed and flung aside the moment a successor took his fancy.

"Monster!" "Horrible tyrant!" are the epithets applied to him by Madame Brancher, Mademoiselle Duchesnois, Thérèse Bourgoïn, Leverd of the Théâtre Française, and the ladies of the Court whom the Imperial caprice had seemed to distinguish for an instant. There is, in fact, overwhelming proof that Napoleon inspired more fear than affection in most of the women who thought themselves honoured by his favour.

And yet there is equally little doubt that he could be chivalrous and tender. To his two empresses, we know, he was gentle, generous and considerate; and Mademoiselle Georges, who came to him



Mademoiselle Georges

without the glamour of birth or rank, which always commanded the respect of the parvenu, draws a charming picture of the Autocrat of Europe as a "tender and thoughtful lover, full of juvenile ardour, as much in love as an officer of twenty." "How," she wrote, long years after she had passed out of his life, "how could one not be fascinated and attracted to such a man? He became small and childish to please me. He was no longer the Consul; he was a man in love, but whose love had neither violence nor roughness. He embraced you sweetly, and his words were tender and modest."

There are few revelations more frank and intimate than are furnished by the Memoirs of Mademoiselle Georges, the beautiful tragédienne who counted two emperors and three kings among her lovers; and who, for two years at least, retained her supremacy in the favour of Napoleon, the most inconstant of men. "It was," as M. Cheramy says, "a veritable affection. It lasted till Napoleon's death." Even in his last clouded hours at St Helena he often spoke of her whom he had formerly called his "beautiful Georgina," or his "good Georgina."

Mademoiselle Georges was almost literally cradled, one February day in 1787, on the stage which she was to adorn for so many years. She was born in the theatre of Bayeux, during a performance of *Tartuffe* and *La Belle Fermière*. She had, needless

to say, the love of the theatre in her blood ; for her father, George Weymer, was manager of a troupe of strolling actors, and her mother, an enthusiastic artiste, had won some provincial fame in soubrette parts. " Leaving Bayeux at the age of ten months," she says in her Memoirs, " my father and mother came to Amiens—my father as *chef d'orchestre* (a rôle which he combined with that of *impresario*), my mother to play the part of soubrette, and my brother Charles, who already, at five years old, scraped the violin. . . . As quite a little one," she ingenuously adds, " I was said to be very pretty."

When little Marguerite (as her baptismal name was) reached the age of five she had already blossomed into a musician, singer, and actress of considerable promise ; and was winning applause on the stage as Perrette in *La Petite Victoire*, a one-act opera. " Really," she says, " I was a great personage ; in fact, it was very curious to see the small five-year-old dairymaid, so small that, for the milkcan which I had to carry on my head, my mother was obliged to find me a cup ; and I had, which made the thing completely farcical, a Guillot and a Colas as big as Don Quixote."

Thus the budding tragédienne grew up to beautiful girlhood, supremely happy in her roving life, applauded to the echo by rustic audiences, petted and spoilt by everyone—acting in opera, comedy

and vaudeville, and varying her stage appearances by taking money in the pay-box. "What happy times they were!" she exclaims, sixty years and more later, when life had lost its savour. "Charming joys of childhood, how much I have regretted you! All the family were busy—how could we ever be bored? My father and mother had everybody's esteem, and we were admitted into the best society. There was not a ball or a festival without Madame Georges' children. It was so jolly; to dream of another existence would have saddened our hearts."

And so the happy, careless years passed all too quickly, until Mademoiselle Raucourt, the famous actress, passing through Amiens, chanced to see Mademoiselle, and was so struck by her beauty and intelligence that, with her father's consent, she carried her off to Paris to train her for her début at the Comédie Française—for the life of an actress in the first theatre in the world. "Farewell! my Amiens!" she exclaims. "Farewell, my joyous dances with my madcap companions! But I shall return. You will see me again certainly, in my elegance. I shall arrive at the theatre in a carriage; and you will all of you crowd round to see your little Mimi, who will never forget you."

Although Mademoiselle Georges was but fifteen when this transformation came in her life, she was already strikingly beautiful. "She was,"

Mademoiselle Raucourt says, "the Venus of Milo descended from her pedestal"; and within a few years her statuesque beauty reached its dazzling zenith. "Her figure," says one chronicler, "is that of the sister of Apollo when she advances on the banks of Eurotas. Her whole person is made to be offered as a model to Guerin's chisel"; another declares, "She is not a statue of Parian marble; she is Pygmalion's Galatea, full of warmth and life."

"The arc of her eyebrows, traced with incomparable purity and strength, stretches over two black eyes full of fire and tragic brilliance; the nose is narrow and straight, cut by oblique nostrils passionately dilated, and joins the forehead with a line of magnificent simplicity. The strong and rather disdainful mouth has charming smiles, expanding with quite Imperial grace; the firm chin, by a majestic contour, terminates the profile, which is more that of a goddess than a woman." Her hands were especially beautiful, "sweet little hands broken by dimples, regular little royal hands, made to carry the sceptre"; and her arms, shoulders and neck were of "an unheard-of richness and magnificence."

Such was the superbly fashioned and beautiful woman who took Paris by storm in 1802 in the part of Clytemnestra. "Not sufficient measures," Geoffrey tells us, "were taken to restrain the extra-

ordinary crowd which such a famous début was bound to attract. All the guard was engaged at the ticket-office, while the entrance door sustained the most terrible siege. There assaults were made which I could only make a tragical description of. . . . Need one be surprised if people are suffocated for such a superb woman ? ”

This first sensational appearance was followed by triumph after triumph—in Tancrede, Cinna, Didon, Artaxerxes. The débutante was hailed as a greater actress than even the divine Rachel ; all the fashionable world of Paris flocked to pay her homage ; and the First Consul himself sent her messages of the most extravagant compliment. She was fussed and petted by the Consul’s family. “ I often lunched,” she says, “ with the Emperor’s mother and his brother Lucien. Then afterwards I had to recite, Lucien giving me my cues, and frequently playing whole scenes by himself. . . . I was the *protégée* of all that great family.”

Lucien was, in fact, at this time the most ardent of her legion of lovers. “ He wished to place me in a house of my own,” she says, “ giving me all the masters possible. I was even taken to see the house ” ; but the “ good Lucien ” was called away to Italy, sending Mademoiselle, as a parting gift, a magnificent scarlet *nécessaire*, with a hundred golden louis at the bottom of the silver-gilt teapot.

The lover who, a few years later, was to refuse

the crowns of Spain and Italy was quickly succeeded by Prince Sapieha, "a great noble who," she says, "was smitten with me"; and who installed her in sumptuous apartments in the rue St Honoré, with a bedroom in lilac and embroidered muslin, a drawing-room in pink silk and black velvet, and a dining-room in white. "There is nothing lacking," she exclaims. "I walk on the magnificent carpets. I see myself reflected in superb mirrors—but I look no more frequently!"

Life was now full of luxury and gaiety and the intoxication of success for the daughter of the *chef d'orchestre*. The Prince cared nothing for love; "he asked nothing but to kiss the tips of my fingers, leaving me in perfect liberty and peaceful innocence." But she tells of lovers less unselfish, one of whom, a banker, insisted on putting her hair in curl-papers, every one of which (and there were twenty of them) she discovered was a five-hundred-franc note.

But Mademoiselle's ambition was not yet satisfied. The First Consul seldom missed any of her performances; he led the applause which was such music to her ears; but he had never spoken to her. "I should like to see him and speak to him," she confesses. "I am told that his voice and speech are very soft. And what a pretty little hand! It is seen to perfection, for he places it in front of his box. Very likely there is some amorous

intention in that. Why not? Great men have their weaknesses, too."

Then the most wonderful thing of all came to pass. One night, on returning home from the theatre, she found Napoleon's chief valet, Constant, awaiting her with a request that she should allow herself to be taken to St Cloud the following evening at eight o'clock, to receive the Consul's congratulations in person. "I was seized with a kind of fright," she confesses. Now that the occasion she had longed for had come, she was "petrified"; she spent a sleepless night, and when the hour arrived, and with it Constant and a carriage, she was "ready to faint from fright." "Reassure yourself," were Constant's soothing words. "You will see how kind the Consul is. Be calm, he is waiting for you with lively impatience."

There was, after all, no occasion for her fears; for when at last she reached St Cloud, and Napoleon entered the magnificent room into which she had been shown, his frank smile and simple greeting soon restored her self-possession. "He came towards me," she says, "with that charming smile which only belongs to him, took me by the hand, and made me sit on the enormous sofa. He lifted my veil, which he threw on the ground without more ado. 'How your hand trembles!' he said. 'Are you, then, afraid of me? Do I seem terrible to you? I found you exceedingly beautiful,

madame, and I wished to compliment you. Tell me your name.' 'Marguerita Josephine.' 'Josephine pleases me, I like that name; but I would prefer to call you Georgina. Hein! would you like it?' "

With such kind and homely words, Napoleon soon dissipated her tremors; and the hours passed quickly in pleasant gossip until five o'clock in the morning, when Mademoiselle at last took her leave, with a promise to return on the morrow. "In saying 'good-bye' he kissed me on my forehead. I was a silly; I burst out laughing, and said to him, 'Ah, that's splendid! You have just kissed Prince Sapieha's veil.'" At the words the Consul's face was convulsed with rage. He took the veil, tore it into fragments, and flung them on the floor; he snatched the chain from her neck and a ring from her finger and ground them under his heels in a transport of anger. Then his fury vanished as quickly as it had come, and in a calm voice he said, "Dear Georgina, you must not have anything except what comes from me."

Such was the first meeting of Napoleon and the tragédienne—a meeting followed by hundreds of others, each of which increased the adoration Mademoiselle Georges felt for her hero lover. "I loved the great man," she says, at a very early stage of their intimacy, "who was surrounding me with such consideration, who was not rough in his

desires, who waited the will of a child and bowed to her caprices." And yet through all her delight ran a vein of sadness. "One is envied the honour of being noticed by the Consul," she says. "It is grand! It is splendid! But at the bottom it is sad—it is slavery with golden chains."

In her Memoirs Mademoiselle Georges draws some charming pictures of Napoleon as lover—the gentleness, playfulness, almost childishness of the man who was so soon to be the master and terror of the world. Now she is sitting with him on the carpet before the library fire at St Cloud, "the Consul playing with me just like a child. Then he climbed a small ladder to reach a book from which he wanted me to read to him, whereupon I wheeled the ladder and him to the middle of the room. He laughed and climbed down, and gave me some little smacks on the cheek." Now he is playing "hide-and-seek" with her with the zest of a schoolboy; an hour later he is kissing the tears from her eyes, and filling her lap with banknotes.

One day he snatches a wreath of white roses from her head, places it on his own, and, looking at himself in the glass, exclaims, "Ha, Georgina, how pretty I am! I look like a fly in some milk." Then he began to sing, and made her sing a duet with him from *La Fausse Magie*. Another day she is walking arm-in-arm in the wood at St Cloud with the "first man in the world." "How many times,"

she wrote in later and much-changed years, " have I recalled that walk in the midst of my tribulations and disappointments. It is all the same—they can't take away that ; I have been for more than two hours arm-in-arm with the master of the world."

During these years Napoleon, beyond a doubt, really loved his beautiful tragédienne. He was amused by her artless chatter ; in her company he found the relaxation and distraction which his nerves and brain at fever-pitch sorely needed ; and her peerless beauty of face and figure was an unfailing delight to him. But such golden days could not last for ever with a lover so ambitious and so unstable as Napoleon. While he was dallying with the actress, the First Consul had never for a moment lost sight of the Imperial crown which was his goal ; and that crown was now his.

" I was overwhelmingly sad," Mademoiselle Georges records. " Why ? I ought to have rejoiced to see the great Napoleon elevated to the rank which he had won. But selfishness is ever present. It seemed to me that, once upon the throne, the Emperor would never see his poor Georgina again. I did not care to see the coronation ceremony. I had places in Notre Dame, but nothing would have induced me to go there." Nor did she go. She looked on at the gorgeous procession, and then returned home with a sad heart,

saying to herself, "All is over." Even when Napoleon paid his first visit as Emperor to the theatre, she never once raised her eyes from the stage to the box; which, she says, "had recently caused me so much joy."

Five weeks later Napoleon expressed a wish to see her, and she was "received with the usual kindness." "How beautiful you are, Georgina!" was his greeting. "What finery!" "Could one be too fine, Sire," she answered, with a sweeping curtsy, "when one has the honour to be received by your Majesty?" "I accepted his kind words," she says, "but I did not trust them. Ought I to believe him? Ought I to doubt him? Yes, I found him just the same as in the past; but I do not know why the Emperor had driven away my First Consul. Everything is much grander and more imposing. Let us look for happiness elsewhere, if it exists at all."

Mademoiselle Georges now realised that her day of supremacy was over. The First Consul, who had loved her and whom she had loved, was dead; and the Emperor was much too magnificent a personage to find any pleasure in the company of an actress. Moreover, she knew that she had been supplanted by a woman as beautiful as herself, and much her superior in rank. And, resigning herself to the inevitable, she left France to seek solace and conquests elsewhere.

Other high-placed lovers she had in the years that followed—the Emperor Alexander I. of Russia, King Jerome, the Prince of Würtemberg, and many another ; but to her last day there was only one man in all the world for her, the “ incomparable, the *immense* ” Napoleon, who had found her beautiful and told her so. She no longer saw the man he had been for her, but the man he had been for France ; like those nymphs who, honoured for an instant by the caresses of a god, never regarded his visage, dazzled as they were by the blinding light of his glory.

In the day of her pride she had said prophetically, “ Perhaps I shall not have enough money to bury me. . . . I shall have a few spadefuls of earth and a few flowers from my friends. What more does one want ? ” And when at last death came to her, at the age of eighty, the last trace of her beauty long fled, her once perfect form shapeless and unwieldy from excessive stoutness, it was the charity of Napoleon’s nephew which alone rescued her from a pauper’s funeral.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KING AND THE WILD ROSE

THE fourteenth Louis of France, probably the handsomest boy who ever wore a crown, had little to learn of the arts of love by the time he came to his twentieth birthday. To the hot passions inherited from a long line of pleasure-loving ancestors he allied physical attractions not one of them all could boast, from the dark eyes, which flashed in the oval of his well-chiselled face, to his tall, well-knit figure, which combined the grace of the boy with the dignity of a king.

He was barely sixteen when he was helplessly caught in the toils of Olympe Mancini, one of Cardinal Mazarin's batch of beautiful nieces—opulent of figure, quick-witted and designing—who led him a merry dance before her uncle found a husband for her in the Comte de Soissons. No sooner was the dangerous Olympe removed from his path than he transferred his volatile affection to Mademoiselle de La Motte-Argencourt, a blue-eyed, golden-haired maid-of-honour, who in turn was placed beyond the zone of mischief in a convent at Chaillot, there to expiate her involuntary crime of having charmed a king for a brief hour.

The maid-of-honour thus removed at the bidding of his anxious mother, Anne of Austria, Louis was quick to find solace in the arms of a second of Mazarin's nieces, Marie Mancini, a dark-skinned beauty, "with eyes as black as her hair, and astonishingly brilliant," who was passionately in love with her handsome young King, and whom he had vowed to marry, when a wife was found for him in a hurry, in Marie Thérèse, Infanta of Spain.

But of all the women who in turn caught Louis' vagrant fancy, from the crafty Olympe to the middle-aged Madame de Maintenon, whom he made wife when the passion of youth had at last grown cold, there was probably not one who found such an intimate place in his heart as Louise de la Vallière, who after her brief period of queendom spent the latter half of her life in the penitence and seclusion of a convent.

Louise de la Vallière was born one August day in 1644, the daughter of Laurent de la Baume le Blanc, who, after a brief and brilliant career as a soldier, had retired to the life of a country gentleman on his manor of La Vallière. There was good blood in Louise's veins, for her ancestors had been brave men since Perrin le Blanc followed the banner of Joan of Arc. Many of them had died gallantly on fields of battle; others, from Jean le Blanc, *maître d'hôtel* to Catherine de Medicis, had worn "fine feathers" at the Royal Court. Louise had

thus a pedigree to be proud of, as she grew from childhood to girlhood, now amid the ancestral splendours of the family castle at Amboise, now in the more modern and modest manor house of La Vallière.

She was but a child of seven when her father's death left her mother a widow, to find a second husband in the Marquis de Saint Remi, a widower, with a daughter of the same age as Louise ; and we soon find the joint families transferred to the Blois Court of Gaston d'Orleans, the King's uncle, whose first steward de Remi was. Here Louise spent a few of her happiest years, with Monsieur's children for playmates, and with the life and glamour of a Royal Court around her. And here she had her first experience of love ; for there were many attractive youths at Gaston's Court, and all of them had a smile and more for the pretty, golden-haired maid from La Vallière.

" Next door to the Remis," M. Jules Lair tells us, " lived the Bragelonges ; a young man of this family saw Louise, and having seen her, felt his heart stir in his breast. He said it and he wrote it. There were answers, further declarations, more answers, a little correspondence, in fact, which the parents soon discovered and suppressed. It is like the blood in springtime ; young passion has these outbursts, which disdain reason and die without leaving a pang behind. Not yet has love

spoken, this is but the love of love." Thus early—for she was still but thirteen—did Louise make her first maiden curtsy to Love, which was to play so great a part in her life.

At Blois, too, no doubt she first set eyes on the young King, still but a boy of nineteen, whose life was destined to be so romantically linked with hers, but who seems at that time to have had no eyes for the shy, blue-eyed girl who was his cousins' playfellow. Had the timid maiden any curiosity, we wonder, any furtive glances, for the King of whom she had heard so much, as she stood modestly obscure behind the ladies of Orleans ?

From Blois M. Remi was transferred to the Luxembourg Palace when Gaston d'Orleans died, and his widow, Marguerite of Lorraine, transferred her Court to Paris ; and here Louise was introduced to all the glitter and gaiety of the world of fashion in the French capital. Nor was it long before she found herself in the very heart of it, when she was appointed maid-of-honour to the new Madame—Henrietta, the sixteen-year-old bride of Philippe d'Orleans, the King's brother, and sister to our own Charles II.

Louise was now in her seventeenth year, and in the first bloom of her girlish beauty. She was tall, we are told, with a slim, lissom and graceful figure. " In riding-dress she looked intensely graceful. A charming head crowned her healthy young form.

Her complexion was very fair ; her blue eyes had an indescribable charm—they were soft and full of expression. Hair of light gold framed her beautiful face. The sound of her voice, extraordinarily sweet, lingered in one's ears ; and those who heard it never forgot it." She was not one of those perfect beauties whom one often admires without loving. She was intensely lovable ; and that line of La Fontaine, "*Et la grace, plus belle encore que la beauté,*" might have been written of her.

There could be no greater contrast than between this shy, sweet, delicately fashioned girl of the blue eyes and golden hair, and the dark, passionate beauty of the Mancini girls, one of whom, Marie, still had the boy-King in her toils ; and it is perhaps small wonder that, when Anne of Austria was searching for a maiden who could lure her son from the seductions of Mazarin's niece, her choice should fall on this "little wild rose" from La Vallière.

Meanwhile, however, Louis was playing the cavalier to his brother's new bride, "Madame" Henrietta of England, whose shadow he was. At Fontainebleau Louis and his sister-in-law were inseparable. When she went out bathing every day he was her companion. After supper, in company with the gallants of the Court, they got into little carriages, and drove to the sound of violins along the grassy banks of the canal. "These woodland drives lasted until two or three o'clock

in the morning, and undoubtedly had an air of great impropriety." Water fêtes and hunting-parties, boating excursions, ballets, balls and concerts followed each other, and in them all Louis was at Madame's side, making open love to her before the eyes of his courtiers.

Anne of Austria was driven to despair by her son's conduct. His passion for Mazarin's niece was bad enough—but this shameless love-making to his brother's wife was an outrage. At any cost it must be stopped; and it was to Louise de la Vallière that she looked to extricate her son from the toils in which he was caught. Thus it was that innocence was bartered for the saving of a dissolute king; and the "little floweret half hidden, but betrayed by its own sweetness," was made to bloom beneath the gaze of him who was soon to be known as the "Roi Soleil."

Nor was Louis reluctant to play his part in his mother's amiable design. A lady-love more or less mattered little to this royal Lothario, and he was content for a time to leave even Madame's side while he dallied with her pretty maid. "Everyone," we are told, "thought her lovely. Several young men made love to her"; and among them the Comte de Guiche, the handsomest roué in France. But when Louis entered the field there was no room for any rival. Louise, her little head full of romance, could not long resist so gallant a



The Duchess de la Valliere.

lover, who came to her in royal guise ; nor did she struggle against Fate. She quickly learnt to love him for himself, and gave him all her heart, in frank and glad surrender. As for the King, he found for once that playing with love was a dangerous game, and before he realised it he was deeply in love with her as she with him.

Many pretty tales are told of this wooing of the " wild rose " by the King of France. In the evenings, we learn, " he would get out of Madame's carriage and go to that of La Vallière, of which the door was shut ; and, as it was night and dark, he could speak with her with much less reserve." Once when a storm broke over the royal party everyone ran to the nearest shelter, leaving Louis to take care of the maid-of-honour. " Take my arm," said the King, " we will go to the chateau." He knew the grounds quite well enough to lose himself for an hour, when he had a mind. " I am getting very wet," Louise ventured presently. " Count the drops of rain," answered the gallant Louis, " and I will give them to you in pearls." On another occasion when he placed in Louise's hand the diamonds he had won in a Versailles lottery, " How beautiful they are ! " she exclaimed, her blue eyes a-sparkle, as she made a motion to return them. " The hands in which they find themselves," was the King's answer, " are much too lovely for them ever to return to mine."

Such are a few of many stories told of these idyllic days. No wonder that both the Queen-Mother and Madame grew alarmed when they saw how deep was the King's infatuation for the maid-of-honour. What was designed as a distraction from more dangerous dallying had already become a profound passion such as no other woman had been able to awake in Louis. Even Louise, when she realised her danger, would have been glad to escape, but she was powerless against a love which now absorbed her life. We know, from her own later confession, that, even in those early days, "remorse spoke quickly enough, never ceasing to cry out in the midst of her glorious moments." But remorse, the anger of Madame and Anne of Austria, and the scandalous tongues of jealous Court ladies were all equally powerless to stay the course of Destiny. She was Louis' body and soul, and he was hers ; and in comparison with such happiness as this nothing else in the whole world mattered.

Absence only served to fan the flames of the King's passion ; for when once Louise was packed off to Vincennes, to get her out of his way, Louis raced after her, fast as his horse could carry him, and after a blissful hour with her was back again at Fontainebleau, having covered thirty-seven leagues betwixt dawn and nightfall. "Almost indifferent to external things, the lovers loved anything which brought them together ; the ball

where they clasped hands, the chase where they rode side by side, the sound of music or the deep silence of the woods—all were equally propitious to love confidences.”

And while she was thus being wooed by the King, Louise was content to occupy her tiny room among the garrets under the palace roof. She sought no gifts, no grandeur. All she asked was love ; and this she had in abundance. When Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente (later known to fame as Madame de Montespan) made her first appearance at the Tuileries, dazzling all with her beauty, Louise had no moment of jealousy ; for the King had eyes for no other woman. His passion waxed fiercer day by day ; he knew no happy hour that was not spent by her side.

But Louise’s bed was not all roses even in these halcyon days. Her lover had many attacks of fierce jealousy which found expression in violent outbursts of rage. After one such outburst, when Louis had retired to bed without making up the quarrel, she “ thought all was over, and lost her head.”

Flying from the Tuileries at dawn, after a sleepless night, she tramped the Paris streets until at last she found refuge in an obscure convent, where she collapsed, worn out with fatigue, cold and utter misery. When news at last came to the King that she had left the palace, and where she was to be

found, he “galloped off there, his face hidden in a grey cloak. He found her still in the parlour, lying on the ground, weeping wildly.” A few words of comfort and soothing and the pressure of warm lips on her tear-stained face quickly brought the light to her eyes, and Louise was soon on her way to the Tuileries, all the happier for a quarrel which had proved such a renewal of love.

Louise was now the acknowledged mistress of the King, a rôle which she played to the end with a rare modesty and unselfishness, disarming much of the malice of the Queen-Mother and of Madame, and the jealousies of the Court ladies. Time and familiarity seemed powerless to quench her lover’s passion. They frolicked together, “like holiday children,” in the woods of Versailles; they danced together in ballets, she as a shepherdess, he as a shepherd; they wrote passionate love verses to each other. And while her husband was thus dallying with the maid-of-honour, his queen, Marie Thérèse, was shedding tears of loneliness and neglect in her apartments, compelled to stay there even on state occasions, because her husband openly announced “he preferred the company of La Vallière.”

Thus the years passed; Louise, although the King’s avowed *maîtresse en titre*, leading the same simple life as when she was a maid-of-honour—living, even in the Palais Brion, which Louis gave

to her, "in a retired manner, seldom going out, and dressed in a loose robe. Those whom she received in the evenings for card-playing saw her only in bed." When Marie Thérèse once, at death's door as she thought, begged her husband to get La Vallière married, he gave the required promise, but recalled it the moment his wife was out of danger, declaring to Louise on his knees, "I should be a vile wretch, indeed, if I could live for anyone but you." To which she made answer, "I could die easily enough ; but I could not give you up. If you cease to love me I know quite well that life would hold nothing for me."

But it was not in Louis' nature to be always true to any woman ; and when the year 1666 came it became evident, even to Louise, that the charm was broken. In vain she protested, "Don't think that my glass does not show me how I have altered. I am not pretty now. I have lost all my looks, and am afraid, that being so, you will want fresh beauties to admire. But be very sure you will not find elsewhere all that I give you." Louis declared that it was her heart that he prized, and not a fresh complexion and bright eyes. But she knew that her day of supremacy was ended ; and that already she had been supplanted by Madame de Montespan, a woman more lovely than she had ever been.

On the time of disillusion that followed this

discovery, with all its mute sufferings, as she saw the gulf widen between her and the man she loved, we may not dwell. She saw Montespan proudly usurping her place, and the King's passion turned to coldness ; until, unable any longer to endure the pain, she sought refuge from the world of vanities behind the veil of a Carmelite nun. Here, as Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, she found such peace as the world can give, declaring, within a year of taking her vow, " I am so absolutely tranquil about all that may happen that I look upon health, illness, rest, work, joy or trouble in the same light."

And as a nun she died thirty-six years later in terrible suffering, praying with her last breath, " Lord, if you increase my anguish, increase my patience also. It is fitting that a sinner should die in desperate agony." They buried her as all her sisters in religion are buried ; and, obeying the usages of the order, a little stone bearing only her religious name and the date of her death was placed above the mould which covered her.

CHAPTER XIX

A DAUGHTER OF POLAND

HÉLÈNE MASSALSKA'S earliest memory was of the nightmare horrors of a flight from "a country where she saw nothing but fierce-looking soldiers whose appearance alone frightened her"—a long, seemingly endless flight, during which the five-year-old child clung to the protecting arm of her uncle, or sobbed herself to sleep on his breast.

It was a turbulent time for her native Poland. Catherine the Great had placed its crown on the head of her discarded lover, Stanislas Poniatowski, and the country was ablaze from end to end with rebellion. But the patriots of the Bar were powerless against the Russian hosts which Catherine poured into their ill-fated land. After a crushing defeat the leaders had to choose between flight and a worse fate ; and among those who chose the more discreet alternative was their leader, Prince Ignace Massalska, the powerful and rich Bishop of Wilna, who carried with him into exile his orphaned nephew and niece, Hélène and her brother Xavier, who had been left to his care. Thus, amid the flames of war and the perils of flight, life opened for the little daughter of Poland whose future was

destined to be as adventurous and disturbed as that of her own ill-fated land.

Safely arrived in France, the Bishop was anxious that his little nephew and niece should receive an education worthy of their rank and fortune, and H  l  ne was promptly placed under the charge of the nuns of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in the most fashionable and select of all the schools for the girls of Paris—in which every pupil and mistress alike was a member of the *haute noblesse*. H  l  ne, child though she was, we are told, had “ a nurse, with apartments of her own and thirty thousand livres (£1200) for pocket-money ” ; and inaugurated her school life with a “ collation ” for her fellow-pupils which cost twenty-five louis.

Here she spent several ideally happy years, holding her little head up as proudly as any of her blue-blooded school friends, adored by both teachers and pupils for her beauty, her gifts, and her winsomeness ; and, as became a little Polish mad-cap, the ringleader of all mischief—“ pouring ink into the holy-water stoup, blowing out lamps, unfastening bell-ropes, creeping into the cells of the novices at midnight to chatter and eat sweets,” or coquetting with the kitchen-boy next door, who would pass to her dainty morsels through a hole in the garden wall, as the tribute of his homage.

On one memorable occasion H  l  ne headed an insurrection against an unpopular teacher. With

her small army of rebels, she seized the kitchen premises, thus cutting off supplies, barricaded and placed a guard over the doors, and "held her fort" until the authorities were brought to a proper state of submission, and the hated mistress was dismissed. But in spite of all such escapades and defiance of all discipline, we learn, the "affection of Madame de Rochechouart (the headmistress) for the 'little wild thing from Poland,' who in return quite 'worshipped her,' was shared by the whole convent."

Thus the years passed happily and merrily for the Bishop's niece, whose gifts were at least equal to her love of mischief. She won more than her share of prizes, she was the most skilful and graceful dancer in the school, while her fame as an actress travelled far beyond the school walls. After seeing her act Esther, "in dress embroidered with diamonds and pearls worth a hundred thousand crowns," the Duchesse de Montemart begged Madame de Rochechouart that she might be allowed to act the part of Joas, in *Athalie*, at her house; and Hélène achieved such a triumph that Molé, whom the Duchesse had engaged to train her company, "was obliged to admit that she played Joas better than the child at the Comédie Française."

But the time was now coming to find a husband for the pretty madcap; for in those days many a little aristocrat was taken from her books straight

to the altar, to return to her studies the bride of a noble possibly older than her own father. There were many such girl-wives among Hélène's school-fellows, countesses and duchesses who brought to their lessons a new dignity, and assumed the airs of great ladies. Of one bride of twelve, Hélène tells us : " She returned the same day, having received magnificent wedding presents ; but what pleased her most was that we all called her ' Madame ' d'Avaux. Everyone gathered round her and asked her a hundred questions. She told us frankly that her husband was very ugly and very old, and that he was coming to see her the next day. We had a glimpse of him from the windows when he arrived, and thought him horrible ! "

For the richly dowered Hélène there was no lack of suitors. The Comtesse de Brionne, one of the greatest ladies of Louis' Court, would gladly have called her daughter-in-law. Prince Frederick de Salm, the handsomest roué in France, would have been equally glad to call her wife, but the Bishop was not disposed to give his niece to a man who, however high born, had so evil a reputation. And the Princesse de Ligne-Luxembourg made no concealment of her anxiety to secure the pretty heiress for her nephew, Prince Charles de Ligne.

In all this matrimonial scheming, Hélène's wishes, as was usual, were the last to be consulted. It was necessary to procure for her the best marriage pos-

sible; and her uncle, the Bishop, was much flattered by the prospect of an alliance with the semi-royal house of Ligne—with the son and heir of the great de Ligne, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Grandee of Spain, Field-Marshal and Chamberlain, with a score of titles of nobility, and one of the greatest, as he was the most fascinating and gifted, of men in France. And to the Bishop's authority was added the subtle influence of Madame de Pailly, who dazzled the schoolgirl's eyes with such visions of the splendours of the Lignes, their lineage, their palaces, their diamonds—"especially certain enormous diamond earrings, known as 'girandoles,' that Prince Charles's wife would wear on state occasions"—that her consent was at last won.

The wedding which speedily followed was celebrated on a scale of magnificence worthy of such an august alliance. The King and Queen were present at the signing of the contract at the palace of Versailles. Hélène took to her husband a dowry of Polish estates valued at one million eight hundred thousand roubles. Her trousseau was provided, at a cost of one hundred thousand crowns, by her uncle, the Bishop, who guaranteed her sixty thousand roubles a year; and Prince Charles's wedding gift from his father was an income of thirty thousand livres, which was to be doubled if he had children.

The religious ceremony, to Hélène's delight, was

celebrated at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, with her school-fellows as guests-of-honour ; and when at last the time came for the bride's departure, " before stepping into the coach-and-six, with its postilions in the pink and silver livery of the Lignes, that was waiting to bear her from the house in which she had been so happy, the emotional girl went quickly to the choir chapel, where her beloved Madame de Rochechouart was buried, to offer up a prayer on her tomb."

A splendid welcome awaited the Prince and his bride at Beloeil, the ancestral home of the Lignes in Flanders. She was greeted by the tenants of the estate dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses, *à la* Watteau. One splendid fête succeeded another in gorgeous and bewildering succession—banquets and balls, concerts and *feux d'artifice*, while the chateau was filled with distinguished guests from all parts of France. To the bride of sixteen, fresh from her convent school, it seemed as if she had stepped into fairyland. The Prince de Ligne was enchanted with his son's wife ; even the haughty Princesse condescended to say that, "she was all that one could desire in a daughter-in-law" ; while all conspired to turn her little head with their homage and flatteries. As for her husband, who was frankly " over head and ears " in love with his beautiful bride, he was a negligible quantity to her ; for he was a serious-minded youth, with little interest in

life apart from his love of pictures and his hobby of collecting engravings—as removed as the poles, in tastes and temperament, from his gay, laughter-loving, pleasure-seeking wife.

As long as the Prince de Ligne, charming, courtly, and devoted to her, remained at Beloeil, the days passed on golden feet for Hélène ; but when, after six months, he flitted off to Versailles, and her husband rejoined his regiment, the time began to pass wearily. The Princesse de Ligne, with her frigid atmosphere, her strict sense of decorum and her autocratic will, was no amiable lady to live with ; and it was not long before the “ little rebel ” rose in arms against her mother-in-law’s virtuous lectures and cold disapproval. She was determined that she would not submit to the “ tyranny ” of the Princesse, and demanded the establishment in Paris that had been promised to her on her marriage. And, as was usual with her, she had her way, in spite of her mother-in-law’s strenuous opposition, and was soon transported to the Court of Versailles, the gayest and giddiest among all “ the butterflies of fashion who fluttered from pleasure to pleasure,” heedless of the rumbling that heralded the storm of the Revolution.

It was in Paris that her first child, Sidonie, was born ; but both at Paris and Vienna, to which she next flitted, the gulf between herself and her husband surely widened, until, utterly weary of

him, and disgusted by his infatuation for the celebrated Countess Kinsky, she at last left him for a long visit to her native Poland, under the pretext of looking after her estates there.

Arrived at Warsaw, and installed in the Massalska palace, Hélène, whose reputation for beauty, wit and fascination had preceded her, was hailed as queen of the brilliant Court which King Stanislas had gathered round him. The greatest gallants vied with each other for her smiles, among them the Grand Chamberlain, Count Vincent Potocki, the most handsome and courtly man in Poland, a cadet of a historic house which ruled over a quarter of a million vassals, and boasted a revenue of nine million florins.

Count Vincent had already divorced his first wife, niece to the King, in order to marry the Countess Anna Mycielska, who was the mother of his two sons ; but he was powerless to resist the fascination of such a woman as Princesse Charles de Ligne, as she proved herself equally powerless against the assaults of the handsome and courtly Count. On each side it appears to have been love at first sight, a love in whose path Fate had placed many obstacles. When news of the liaison came to Countess Anna's ears at Kowalowka, she returned post-haste to Warsaw. Violent scenes ensued between her and her faithless husband, followed by scenes between Hélène and the Count, until the latter, in despair of

pacifying the rival woman, took refuge in flight. But even in flight there was no escape for him ; for, after writing a heartbroken letter, in which she vowed that she abandoned all claim to his affection, while “swearing that he should be the eternal object of hers,” H  l  ne followed him to Kowalowka, and quickly had him in her toils again.

She was, however, by no means content to be the mistress, the plaything, of the man she loved so recklessly. She must be his wife ; and, with this object, she set to work to procure divorces, then too easily obtained, for both him and herself. One obstacle was quickly removed by the death of her husband, on a battlefield near Mons, the news of which so pleased her that she wrote to her lover : “A cannon-ball has carried off Prince Charles. I am free, free at last ! It is an act of Providence. As Madame S  vign  said on hearing of Turenne’s death, ‘ That cannon was loaded from all eternity ! ’ ”

But Countess Anna still blocked the way to the altar ; and the divorce decree, which her uncle had promised to procure, was long in coming from Rome. Too impatient to await its arrival, the reckless pair were secretly wedded at midnight in a chapel on the outskirts of Vienna. As the bride entered the chapel, she suddenly stopped short and looked before her with terror in her eyes. In the dim and flickering light of the tapers she fancied she saw three coffins in the aisle between her and the altar.

In an instant the vision had gone ; but it remained in her memory until it had its terrible realisation.

Life was very sweet now for H  l  ne, Countess Potocki—a life of peace and profound happiness amid the rural beauties that surrounded her husband’s home, Kowalowka. Her only occupation was to please the man she loved ; and with this object she decked her beauty in every bizarre costume of her native land, “ to-day in a poppy-coloured dress of Turkish material, trimmed with silver *   la Mameluke* ; the next day, in a polonaise of white Indian silk, embroidered with pink flowers ; another day, in a Cossack tunic of *dyftich* fringed with gold.”

But such halcyon days were not destined to last long. The Countess Anna, hearing of the marriage in distant Paris, was, as she wrote to the Bishop of Wilna, returning to Poland, “ to take steps to break up the illegal union ”—for the divorce had not yet been decreed. The Count and Countess and the Bishop were all in equal alarm, and spent three months of misery and anxiety before the Countess could be persuaded to withdraw her threat, on the very day when the Bishop, against whom her chief anger seems to have been directed, was arrested on a charge of high treason, and, after being dragged alive through the streets of Warsaw for seven hours, was finally hanged on a gibbet in front of the cathedral.

But trouble was now gathering thickly around Hélène. Her beloved Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria ; her estates were confiscated ; and the Countess Anna set up a claim for her son to be declared sole heir to Count Vincent's fortune. Although thus stripped of fortune for herself and of all prospects for the children of her second marriage, she still had her husband, " whom she regarded as the ideal of perfection, her two little boys and her baby girl, whom she adored, and her beautiful home." " What more can I desire ? " she exclaimed, little knowing how soon these remaining blessings were to be taken from her.

Within a few weeks her three children—first her baby, then her second son Vincent, and last, Alexis, her firstborn—were suddenly snatched from her arms by death ; and as she stood by the side of the grave in which two of her children lay, and saw the little bier of the third lowered into it, the memory of the three coffins she had seen on her wedding night came back to her. " Three ! There are really three," she shrieked, and fell insensible to the ground.

Before she had recovered from this terrible grief, Kowalowka, her beautiful home, was seized by the Count's creditors, and the contents of the chateau dispersed, her own portrait being sold for a few florins. She was now compelled to make her home at Brody, in Galicia, in a chateau " situated in a

swamp filled with frogs that croaked night and day," in a country which was "the abomination of desolation." Here, as if Fate had not been sufficiently unkind, still more trouble awaited her. Her husband began to grow weary of her, finding constant fault with her, and, worse than all, finding his chief pleasure in the society of her companion, a Polish young lady as fair as herself.

The crisis was reached when she surprised the lovers in a compromising situation. A terrible scene followed ; and within a quarter of an hour the Countess fled, in tears, from her husband's roof to that of her sister at Klekotow. When, after a week's absence, she was induced to return home, it was only to find the old quarrels and jealousies revived, which once more drove her to flight. This time the Prince de Ligne acted as peacemaker, and, with much difficulty, persuaded her to go back to her husband. "When she arrived at the chateau he was waiting at the door to greet her. At the sight of him she felt as if her heart would break. She leapt from the carriage, and flung herself into his arms. 'Oh, Vincent, how I love you!' she murmured brokenly as he kissed her. Only five days separated her departure and return, but the time was sufficient to convince her that her heart was bound to his for ever."

Shortly after this second reconciliation the Potockis took up their abode in Paris. The

Revolution had swept away many of her old friends and schoolfellows, who had walked with firm step and proudly carried head to the guillotine ; the splendours of Louis' Court had been replaced by Napoleon's bourgeois retinue. It was a strangely changed Paris to which H  l  ne returned after thirty years of absence ; but she was still beautiful, and at her Paris house and country chateau she held a Court far more brilliant than that over which the First Consul's wife presided.

Here at last she took once more to her arms and heart her daughter Sidonie, now grown to lovely young womanhood ; but not until she came as bride of Fran  ois Potocki, son of her husband and his discarded wife, the Countess Anna—a union which, combining as it did the fortunes of the two houses, de Ligne and Potocki, had been a long-cherished project. The meeting of mother and daughter, so long separated, was infinitely touching. When at last the bridal carriage drove up, H  l  ne's suspense was so great that she was at the door before they could alight. A single glance assured her that she need fear no reproach from her daughter. " Oh, my child, my only child," she cried, in a voice shaken with sobs, as she clasped her in her arms, " you are all that I love most in the world "—adding, in a sudden fit of hysterical gaiety, " after my husband, *bien entendu*."

Once more H  l  ne's cup of happiness was full—

rich and admired, living at last in Paris, the object of her dreams, with the husband she worshipped, and assured of the affection and devotion of her children. But Fate never permitted the Countess to be happy long. One day in 1815 the end came with tragic suddenness. She was seized with terrible internal pains, and a few hours later she died in her daughter's arms, after writing a letter, full of affection, to her husband, absent in Poland.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROMANCE OF A MAD EMPEROR

It was scarcely possible that the child of Catherine II. of Russia, "High Priestess of Pleasure," and her husband, Peter III., "drunkard and imbecile," as his own son called him, could be normal ; and there can be little doubt that Tsar Paul was cradled with the taint of insanity in his veins, the insanity which, after he had come to his crown, was to take such violent forms, and to close his brief and turbulent reign in tragedy.

The germs of madness were, however, long in developing ; and in his youth and early manhood at least, Paul was as normal and sane as any prince in Europe, with quite a liberal endowment of amiable qualities. Physically he was dwarfish and ugly ; but, although from childhood he was a prey to nerves, a hasty temper, and a stubborn autocratic will, he was amiable and generous almost to a fault. Those who knew him in these early years found him both intelligent and charming. "It is impossible," says Asseburg, a foreign diplomatist, "to combine more brightness of intellect, more sweetness and charm, than he exhibits."

One of his tutors, however, more discerningly

describes Paul in these prophetic words, " He has intelligence ; but the mechanism of his head is only held together by a thread. If the thread should happen to break, the mechanism will all be out of gear, and then, good-bye to reason and good sense." How, within a score of years, the thread did break, and with what terrible consequences, the world knows.

But at the time Paul wooed and married his second bride he was a goodly young man, with power to charm one of the fairest princesses in Europe, and to inspire a love which she retained almost to his last day. He had been married as a boy of nineteen to a daughter of the Landgraf of Hesse-Darmstadt, with whom, as Catherine his mother says, he "fell in love as soon as he saw her"; but after a very brief wedded life his Grand Duchess had died in childbirth, leaving him a widower almost before he had reached man's estate.

For a time he was disconsolate, although he had good reason to know that his dead wife had been more than kind to his best friend, André Razoumovsky, until Catherine bestirred herself to find a second princess for her son. It is true the Empress had always hated Paul, who was more than suspected of being the son, not of Catherine's husband, Peter III., but of her lover Soltykoff. From his cradle she showed a marked aversion to him ; she would rarely allow him to come into her presence ;

and on the few occasions when she must see him, treated him with such coldness that he soon learnt to fear, and then to hate her in turn.

But it was necessary for the stability of her throne that Paul should provide an heir to it ; and thus it was that she wrote to Grimm : “ Seeing the vessel go down on one side, I made haste to throw it over on the other. I lost no time in setting to work to repair the loss, and so succeeded in dissipating the gloom into which our trouble had plunged us.” In other words, having lost one wife, she determined that her son should not long lack a successor ; and, sending her emissaries on a tour of exploration through the courts of Europe, she had no difficulty in finding the “ Princess Charming ” in Dorothea of Würtemberg-Montbeliard, grand-niece of the Great Frederick himself, a princess then in the first bloom of her loveliness.

“ The Princess Dorothea,” Madame Oberkirch wrote, “ was then seventeen years of age. She was beautiful as Aurora ; of that majestic stature which sculptors love to emulate, combining with a delicate regularity of features the most noble and imposing grace. Hers was, indeed, a regal beauty.” And that the description is by no means exaggerated the portraits of the future Empress of Russia show ; for they reveal a girl of surpassing beauty of face and figure, full of a queenly dignity and gracious-

ness. And to these physical perfections were allied equally rare qualities of head and heart.

To Catherine's fastidious eyes she appeared perfectly charming. "I have grown passionately fond of this delightful creature," she wrote, a few weeks after first seeing her. "She is just what I had hoped she would be. She has the figure of a nymph, and a complexion of lilies and roses. Her skin is transparent ; she is well-proportioned, and walks with grace and elegance. She has an excellent heart, and is gentle and equable in temper ; and her face is expressive of all the beautiful qualities of the soul. She wins everybody's love, for she is worthy of universal affection."

As for Paul, he was completely undone at first sight, in Berlin, of the radiant young girl who was to be his bride. He found her, as, in a studiously restrained letter, he told his mother, "pretty, tall and graceful," "good and sensible at heart," "highly educated and yet simple in her habits, and domestically inclined." And he was all impatience for the day when she should be "all his own." Paul's enthusiasm for his bride-to-be was more than reciprocated by his beautiful princess, who, soon after her betrothal, wrote to him, "I cannot go to bed, my dear and adorable Prince, before telling you once more that I love and adore you to distraction. God alone knows what pleasure it will be to me soon to belong to you entirely.

All my future life will prove to you my sentiments ; yes, dear, adorable, dearest Prince, all my life will I devote to you, and give you constant proofs of my attachment, and of the love with which my heart is beating for you. Good-night, adorable Prince ; sleep well, banish all phantoms, but dream of one that adores you."

Surely never has marriage held greater promise of happiness than this which, one October day in 1776, united the future Tsar of Russia to his girl-bride from Würtemberg, who was to be known hereafter as " Maria Feodorovna " ; and that it failed was no fault of the Princess, who fulfilled to the letter her promise to dedicate " all her future life " to her husband. The cause of the unhappiness that followed is to be found in Paul's growing insanity, which culminated when, twenty years later, he came to his throne.

Their early years of wedded life at least were happy. For this we have the words of the Grand Duchess, who, after they had been married a year, wrote to a friend : " The Grand Duke is the most adorable of husbands. I am very glad that you do not know him, for you would certainly have fallen in love with him, and then I should have been jealous. My dear husband is an angel, and I love him to distraction." Even our ambassador at the Russian Court was able to pay this tribute : " They are as happy as can be ; *but* I tremble for

the duration of this happiness in the midst of such a corrupt and ill-assorted Court." Maria Feodorovna's happiness was complete when, shortly before the birth of her first son, she wrote to her husband, " My soul is full of joy, of happiness, and of satisfaction. . . . Live happy and contented, live a thousand years to do good to millions of subjects. Such is the wish of your tender and faithful friend and wife. I adore you, I love you to distraction. You are my Idol, my Supreme good ; and I cherish you beyond words."

Thus ideally passed the first few years of wedded life for the royal couple, " bound to each other," to quote Catherine's own words, " by the ties of mutual affection and understanding, she loving and ruling him " ; and so it might have been to the end had Paul not inherited his father's insanity, which was now beginning to manifest itself.

Still held at arm's-length by his mother, and shut out from all participation in affairs of State, even from the duties of his rank, his inactivity filled him with ennui, and his hatred of the Empress became a morbid obsession. " My brow is wet with sweat—not from fatigue but boredom," he wrote pathetically to Platon in 1781, from the rustic retirement of Gatshina to which his mother had banished him. Even his tour of Europe, which began in the following autumn, did little to dissipate the gloom which was more and more enveloping his

ill-balanced brain. He became a prey to delusions ; imagined that the whole world was in a conspiracy to slight and thwart him ; and he began to see visions—as on that memorable occasion when, walking with a friend at night in the streets of St Petersburg, he declared that the wraith of his grandfather, Peter the Great, was keeping pace with him, speaking to him, and transfixing him with “ a pair of glittering eyes.”

His temper, never of the best, began to exhibit itself in outbursts of rage and violence ; and when he was not brooding in solitude over his fancied wrongs, or lashing himself into fits of fury, he made himself ridiculous by his mania for military display. And through all these stages of incipient madness Maria Feodorovna remained the devoted wife, allaying his suspicions, soothing his rages, and in every possible way trying to brighten life for him. It was at this time that Catherine, who was ever her son's worst enemy, tried to sow discord between him and his wife by throwing him more and more into the company of Mademoiselle Nelidov, who alone among the ladies of her Court seemed to attract him.

Mademoiselle Nelidov, who was fated to play an important part in the Grand Duke's life, was born in 1758, the daughter of a fairly substantial landowner in Smolensk. As a young girl she was sent for her education to a convent school at Smolna for the

daughters of noblemen, and while there attracted the notice of the Empress, who, when her schooldays were over, sent her as maid-of-honour to the Grand Duchess Natalia Alexievna, Paul's first wife, thus transporting the rustic maiden to the glamour and dangers of the Court.

Not that the landowner's daughter seemed in any great danger of corruption, for she had small beauty to draw the eyes of gallants. Her hair and complexion, we are told, were dark ; she was slender and graceful, with bright intelligent eyes ; but her face, although full of expression, was plain. She was, however, a dancer of incomparable grace ; she could sing sweetly ; she was extremely witty, and a clever conversationalist, and thus had more power to charm than many women of greater physical attractions. Such was Mademoiselle Nelidov, who, after the Grand Duchess Natalia's death, became one of the ladies of her successor, Maria Feodorovna.

Fresh from her convent seclusion, a stranger to the glamour and gallantries of a Court, it was perhaps as inevitable that Mademoiselle Nelidov should be attracted by the courtliness and charm of the Grand Duke, as that her heart should go out in sympathy to a prince so unfortunate, shut out from all the privileges of his position, and a prey to morbid fancies ; and it was equally inevitable that Paul should be drawn to a woman who gave such

proofs that she understood and sympathised with him, and who had such a power to charm away his gloomy moods.

So marked became the attraction of one for the other that it soon began to be whispered in Court that the maid-of-honour was the mistress of the Grand Duke. What other construction could jealousy put on their frequent meetings, their long conversations, and the pleasure each so evidently took in the other's company? But there were others, more charitable, who saw nothing in the connection but a harmless friendship. "The natural amiability and chivalry of his manner," says Shumigovsky, "lent an air of intrigue to his relations with the maid-of-honour; but the plainness of the girl prevented any idea of there being any serious connection between them." And among those who, at this time, took this generous view was the Grand Duchess herself, who looked amiably on while her husband paid attentions to her maid-of-honour.

As for Mademoiselle Nelidov, she cared little what scandalous tongues might say. She was perfectly happy in the understanding that existed between the Grand Duke and herself, in her power to comfort and to guide him. He called her his "guardian angel," the only person in Russia who really understood him, and in whom he could confide; and to her he was "her little Paul" to whose weakness

she supplied strength, and into whose life she brought brightness and hope. If there was love between them it was purely platonic.

It was inevitable, however, that sooner or later the Grand Duchess should feel the pangs of jealousy. In one such mood she complained to the Empress, who, for answer, led her daughter-in-law to a mirror. "There!" she said, "see how beautiful you are. Your rival is an ugly little thing; leave off fretting, and be assured of your charms."

If any doubt could exist of the purity of this relationship it was surely removed once for all by a letter written by Paul to his mother in 1790, when illness had brought him to the verge of death. "In this solemn moment of my life," he wrote, "I have to fulfil a duty towards my God and my conscience. I have noticed how much human malevolence has been busy misinterpreting the spiritual bond which unites me to Mademoiselle Nelidov. I swear before the divine Tribunal, from which none of us can escape, that both of us can appear before it without any reproach. Why could I not seal my oath with my blood? But, in bidding good-bye to life, I solemnly declare that our connection has been pure, and holy, and without blemish."

Two years later, in 1792, Mademoiselle, weary of the vanities of Court life, and of the continued scandal which assailed her fair name, retired to the

convent of Smolna, but in answer to Paul's pleading, in which his wife, now satisfied of her perfect innocence, joined, she returned again. Paul's insanity had made rapid strides during her absence, and the Grand Duchess was glad to have the help of the woman who had such a power to soothe and influence him. But Paul was now beyond even her reach ; in his insane moods he resented all her efforts to control him, and showed such a marked aversion to her that in despair she retired once more to her convent, vowing in her disappointment that she would never see him again.

This vow, however, was fated to be broken ; for when Catherine's death placed her mad son on the throne of Russia, Mademoiselle Nelidov went back to St Petersburg, this time at the urgent request of the new Emperor. But her day of influence was ended. He was already in the toils of the beautiful Princess Gagarina, daughter of Lapoukhin, the Moscow Director of Police, who was his avowed mistress. There was nothing platonic in this new relationship in spite of the statement of the Swedish ambassador, who " was sure that, as Paul was very religious, there was nothing of a sensual character in his liaison with Mademoiselle Lapoukhin."

For his new favourite he had a palace built on the Quay de Neva, near the house in which his ex-barber, Koutayssov, now a Count and Grand Master of the Horse, had established his own

mistress, a French actress ; and, Sablukov tells us, “ I have frequently seen the Emperor leave his barber there, and fetch him away again on his return from his own mistress.” The Princess’s father was raised by the Tsar to princely rank ; her husband had his sumptuous apartments in the palace Paul had built for his wife ; and the highest posts at Court and in the State were filled by her relatives and friends.

Powerless in face of such rivalry as this, Made-moiselle Nelidov again returned to the Smolna convent, where she spent the rest of her long life in seclusion and piety ; and it was at Smolna that news reached her of that last terrible scene in the life of her royal lover, when Paul was dragged from the chimney of his bedroom, in which he had sought to escape the fury of his assailants, and was strangled with his own scarf, while the Empress vainly hammered at the locked door, impotent to save the husband whom she loved to the last.



The Empress Marie Louise.

CHAPTER XXI

A TRAITRESS TO LOVE

WHEN, one April day in 1814, the Comte de Sainte-Aulaire brought to Marie Louise the news of her husband's downfall, the Comte d'Haussonville tells us, "She was but half awake when she received him, sitting at the side of the bed with her bare feet showing from beneath the coverlet.

"Completely overcome by the gravity of the situation, for the letter of which he was the bearer not only brought the news of the fall of the Empire, but also that of Napoleon's attempted suicide at Fontainebleau, Monsieur de Sainte-Aulaire stood with his eyes cast down, anxious to appear unconscious of the effect produced on the Empress by this sad intelligence. 'Ah! you are looking at my feet,' she exclaimed; 'I am always being told how pretty they are.' "

In such fashion did the shallow-hearted daughter of the Emperor of Austria, the grand-niece of Marie Antoinette, receive the blow which had hurled her bourgeois husband from the Empire of Europe, regardless of the fact that, but a few weeks earlier, she had written to Madame de Crenneville, "You can imagine my happiness at being with my family ;

nevertheless, my pleasure is clouded by sorrow at being separated from the Emperor. I cannot be really happy unless I am with him."

One can thus imagine that it was with no heavy heart that Marie Louise bade farewell to France, a few days later, and, accompanied by a brilliant retinue, with an escort of Austrian soldiers, set forth on her royal progress to Aix, while the husband who had placed the crown of empress on her empty head was making his sorrowful journey to his exile in Elba. To her this leisurely escape from the ruins of her past splendour was a pleasure jaunt every day of which she frankly enjoyed, from the regal entertainments provided for her by Prince Eugène at Munich to her exploration of the beauties of the Chamouny Valley, the glaciers of Bossons, and the cascade of Pissevache.

Three delightful months she spent on her journey before she came at last to Aix, where she was to take the waters. Here she was welcomed at the entrance to the town by a man who, although she little suspected it, was destined to play a very important part in her life, and who, as he stooped in courtly fashion over her hand, gave his name as Adam Albert de Neipperg. Forty years of age, with the erect figure of a soldier, with fair curly hair and a ruddy complexion, de Neipperg was a goodly man to look on, although he had lost the freshness of youth, and in spite of the black bandage which

he always wore over his right eye destroyed in battle.

But a few years earlier Madame de Stael had dubbed Neipperg the "German Bayard"—a tribute alike to his daring on many a field of battle, to his many gifts and graces and to his chivalrous attitude to women. Although his father was a Frenchman, he had proved himself the bravest soldier in the Austrian army, and had won his marshal's baton on the field of Leipzig. He had, too, won laurels as a skilful diplomatist ; he was a courtier to his finger-tips and a man of many accomplishments. Such was the hero of romance who had been deputed by Prince Metternich to receive the ex-Empress and to amuse and entertain her on her arrival at Aix, with the disappointing result that, we are told, " he produced a disagreeable impression on the mind of Marie Louise, and she made no attempt to conceal it."

But Neipperg was no man to be easily chilled by the cold looks of any woman. He had had too many experiences of conquest ; and so assured was he that he would not fail with Napoleon's wife that, on leaving Milan to welcome her at Aix, he declared to his mistress—a lady whom he had stolen from her husband—" Before six months are over I shall be her lover, and not long after, her husband."

At Aix the ex-Empress was by no means minded to spend her time as a mournful, disconsolate grass-

widow. Her exiled husband had already become only a disturbing memory, revived on the rare occasions when she wrote to him. Surrounded by her French suite, her coachmen and footmen still wearing the livery of the Tuileries, and the Imperial arms displayed on the panels of the carriages Napoleon had so lavishly provided for her, she was once more the Austrian Princess, the splendours of her life in France no more than a dream to her.

Distraction and gaiety were all she craved for, and she had them in abundance. Her days at Aix were crowded with pleasure. She was present at every public entertainment. She gave garden-parties, banquets and receptions. She went for long rides every day and spent lazy hours boating on the lake of Bourget. She flung aside her royal dignity and mingled on terms of familiarity with all classes, now coquetting with French officers, now joining, often unasked, in some bourgeois dance with a tradesman's arm around her waist. So unseemly, in fact, became her conduct that the Duc de Berry reported in August to the Council of Ministers that " Marie Louise was behaving at Aix in the most undignified way " ; and at last her father, the Emperor, was obliged to order her to leave Aix, and to take care that her conduct in future should be more decorous.

From Aix, she went for a tour in Switzerland with Neipperg, whose mistress, it is said, she already

was, for companion and guide—so quickly had the one-eyed hero justified his boast and so quickly had Marie Louise succumbed to the fascinations of a man who had produced such “a disagreeable impression” on her but a few weeks earlier. And while his wife was thus enjoying her “honeymoon” among the Swiss mountains, Napoleon in distant Elba was looking forward with longing to her coming, and watching the painter decorating her boudoir-ceiling with two turtle-doves attached to the opposite ends of a ribbon, by a knot which would tighten as they flew apart—the two white birds, symbols of innocence and love, representing Marie Louise and himself!

How could the Empress spare a thought to her fallen husband under such idyllic conditions with the Comte de Neipperg pouring flatteries into her ears, supporting her among the perils of precipices and glaciers, witching her with his guitar and his love songs, and surrounding her with every delicate ministration? Alone among the glories of Grindelwald, Lauterbrünnen and the Rigi, for Marie Louise had left all other escort behind, the lovers spent a halcyon time before they returned to Berne. Here the Empress found Caroline, Princess of Wales, awaiting her return—an exile like herself, separated from her husband, “the first gentleman in Europe,” and equally determined to “have a good time.”

The story of the meeting of these two royal ladies,

so strangely allied in misfortune and so indifferent to it, is full of romance, from their first greeting, when Caroline, gorgeous in a dress of white muslin and lace, with necklace of pearls and diamond diadem, introduced her "protégé Austin," the silly boy who was said to be her illegitimate son, to the merry dinner, after which Empress and Princess merged their voices in a duet from Mozart's *Don Juan*.

From Berne Marie Louise journeyed next to Schönbrunn, and we find her taking part in the brilliant series of fêtes, gala performances, tournaments and parades, with which "the allied sovereigns of Europe celebrated the fall of her husband, watching without any apparent emotion the dances in which such personages as Metternich, Castlereagh and others of Napoleon's successful antagonists took part." Her severance from her husband was now complete, for she no longer took the trouble to answer such of his letters, full as ever of longing and appeal, as reached her. There was only one man now in all the world for her. She was hopelessly in love with her one-eyed cavalier, and "no longer even took the trouble to hide her strange fascination for the man, to whom there is little doubt she now belonged both body and soul." She was ideally happy riding and driving with him—excursions, during which, we are told, "they would sometimes stop for a while at a farm, or rest under

a clump of trees to admire the landscape. On these occasions they would refresh themselves with the milk and household bread supplied by some neighbouring cottage." Billiards, music and painting, with Neipperg by her side, filled the remainder of the days with such happiness as she declared she had never known before.

Her only ambition now was to secure the Duchy of Parma, and when this was granted to her, even at the cost of giving up the child she had borne to Napoleon, her cup of joy was full ; for she was now assured of a kingdom all her own, with the beloved Neipperg to share her throne. But her cup of happiness was not to be without its bitterness to the taste ; for scarcely had the good news come to her when it was followed by the paralysing rumour that Napoleon had escaped from Elba and was on his way back to France. Could anything be more annoying than the sudden reappearance of a tiresome husband just when she had practically forgotten his existence and was going to be so happy ? Worse still, her lover was to be taken from her side, for at Napoleon's coming all Europe sprang as one man to arms to crush the ogre a second time. Such a soldier as Neipperg could not be spared at such a crisis, and on the 1st April 1815 we find him bidding Marie Louise a tearful farewell before joining the Austrian army to oppose Murat's advance in Italy. They were days of great anxiety that followed

for Marie Louise, relieved, however, by the long and frequent letters of her lover from the seat of war. She was, too, "bored to death" during his absence, and driven to all sorts of mad expedients to banish her ennui and her fears for Neipperg's safety. Thus we read of her going for wild gallops over the roughest ground she could find, the prospect of breaking her neck adding to her zest ; or entering church in the middle of High Mass, decked from head to foot in pink, and followed by a servant carrying a huge silken bag containing a prayer-book, to the disturbance of the shocked worshippers.

But the darkest night at last yields to dawn ; Napoleon was once more a broken man and a prisoner, and the gallant Neipperg was on his way back to be crowned with fresh laurels. When the Baronne de Montet ventured to carry the tragic news to the Empress, all the answer she got for her pains was, "Thank you ; I had already heard the news. I want to ride to Merkenstein ; do you think the weather is fine enough ? " Napoleon's second and crowning disaster found his wife as heartlessly indifferent as the first.

While her husband was journeying to his last home of exile, St Helena, Marie Louise was making her royal entry into Parma, with her beloved Neipperg, "in a gorgeous costume embroidered with gold and covered with decorations," at her side, and followed by a procession of eighteen

carriages containing her chamberlains and the ladies of her ducal court ; and it was to the clashing of bells from sixty church steeples, and through dense avenues of cheering and jubilant subjects that she drove from the service of solemn thanksgiving to the ducal palace.

At last Marie Louise had reached the goal of her ambition. Her husband might "eat his heart out" in St Helena, and welcome. She was a "queen" now in her own right, and, more even than this, she was with the man she loved as, to quote her own words, "no man was ever loved by woman before." As for Neipperg, he was not only husband in all but the name to the reigning Duchess, he was virtual Duke of Parma, First Chamberlain, Minister of War and Foreign Affairs, and Controller of the Court and Palace.

In her duchy Marie Louise continued her life of gaiety, with no thought of the husband whose life was ebbing out in loneliness and pain on St Helena. Carnivals and balls and feasts succeeded each other, varied by delightful excursions on foot and on horseback with her adored Neipperg, while her evenings were spent in playing "billiards, backgammon, chess or draughts." The Duchess vowed in her letters that she had never been "so happy or so peaceful in her life" ; and no doubt her peace was enhanced by the fact that at last she had the blessing of the Church on her union with her lover, for he

became her morganatic husband in the summer of 1820. That Napoleon was still alive and that her marriage was thus invalid seems to have little disturbed this lady of the easy conscience.

On the 28th April 1821, now near the end of his life, Napoleon confided his last wishes to his doctor, Antommarchi: "I wish you to place my heart in spirits of wine, and take it to my beloved Marie Louise at Parma. You will tell her that I have loved her dearly, and that I have never ceased to do so." "You may be quite sure," he said a little later to General Bertrand, "that if the Empress has made no effort to lighten my troubles it is because she is surrounded by spies who prevent her knowing anything of what I am made to suffer. Marie Louise is virtue personified." At the very time when Napoleon was thus full of undying love and tender thought for his wife, believing in her virtue as he believed in his Maker, the Duchy of Parma was rejoicing over the birth of the second child of which her morganatic husband was father!

"I confess that I am extremely shocked," the Duchess wrote to her friend, "Chère Victoire," when news came to her that Napoleon was dead. "Although I have never had any deep feeling for him, I cannot forget that he is the father of my son. You will be sorry to learn that I have been so dreadfully bitten in the face by gnats that I look a monster

and am glad not to be obliged to show myself." The disfiguring gnat-bites were a greater tragedy to her than the death of the man who had given her an Imperial crown and had treasured her in his heart to his last breath.

But what more could be expected of a woman of whom we read, "It was the Comte de Scarampi's wont to call on her every morning with his portfolio; but hardly had he opened it when the Princess would call her parrot, or her small monkey, which would perch on her shoulders; and she never ceased talking to it, or playing with one or other of these pets during the whole of the interview?"

Thus, in the frivolous pursuit of pleasure, passed a dozen years of quasi-married life, for although Marie Louise was a free woman, Neipperg's wife was still alive. His passion for his empty-headed Princess had long burnt itself to ashes. He was, we are told, "bored to death" with her follies and her shallowness, and spent his days fuming and fretting at the wasted years. In July 1828 his health began to fail, and after a painful illness he died on the morning of 22nd February 1829, leaving but a few louis out of the millions that had passed through his hands, as an inheritance for his children. Marie Louise was disconsolate at the loss of "the best husband, the most faithful friend, and all her worldly happiness." She gave him a funeral of regal splendour, and raised over his tomb a

monument in Carrara marble, at a cost of one hundred and twenty thousand francs.

That her grief was both sincere and deep there can be no question, for to Neipperg she had given all the love of which she was capable. For a time she shut herself up in her palace, clothed in the deepest mourning, declaring that "her home and her happiness had been completely destroyed;" and that she had nothing left to live for; and for some years the tears would start to her eyes at the mention of his name. But Marie Louise could not live without the love and companionship of man; and in 1833 we find her proposing marriage to her new Imperial Commissioner, Bombelles, who, although he "received the proposal with bewilderment," yielded to her wishes, and assumed the rôle of her third husband.

The Comte de Bombelles, however, was no Neipperg in the arts of love. Marie Louise soon wearied of his coldness, and before long we find her infatuated by the black-whiskered, swarthy tenor, Jules Lecomte, a man, we are told, with a good figure, charming manners and a distinguished appearance. No sooner had she set eyes on the handsome young singer than she sent for him to Court, and made him sing to her alone, "a slavery which was both pleasant and exacting, for the blood of Lucrezia Borgia flowed in Marie Louise's veins."

“ I am Napoleon’s successor,” Lecomte wrote a few days later to his friend Souverain. “ It is not known at the Tuileries ; but I know it here, at Parma. I sang to Marie Louise, and she kept me to supper, which lasted all night. When I awoke in the morning I fancied myself the Emperor.” “ Marie Louise did not love Napoleon,” says Arsène Houssaye, “ but she adores Jules Lecomte. . . . The following would be a suitable inscription for her tomb : “ Here lies one who commenced with an Emperor and ended with a tenor.”

CHAPTER XXII

A PRINCESS OF MONACO

“ IT is thus that everything changes, everything passes ; and when one thinks it all over, it is not worth while being born.” Such are the cynical words of disillusionment which appear more than once in the Memoirs of Charlotte, Princess of Monaco, whose brief life strikingly illustrates the vanity of beauty, riches and rank. Fortune was prodigal to her in her favours, but there was no gift which she did not prostitute, no “ talent ” which she did not squander.

When Louis I. of Monaco, the prince whom Charlotte de Gramont was destined to wed, was cradled, one day in the year 1642, he was born to a goodly heritage ; for his grandfather, Honoré Grimaldi, the reigning prince, was basking in the sunshine of Louis XIII.’s special favour. Louis had just conferred on him the Duchy of Valentinois, the Comté of Saint Rémy, and a *seigneurie* in Provence. He had made Honoré’s son, Hercules, Marquis de Baux ; and had offered to stand sponsor to his infant son.

Thus, with the King of France as protector and dispenser of new dignities, the little principality of

Monaco, which would one day be the infant's heritage, was able to raise its head in pride, and to look forward to a new era of prosperity. Nor was Fate long in preparing the child's way to his kingdom. Before he had well begun his schooling, his father, the next heir to the princeship, was removed by a tragedy. One day when Hercules, Marquis de Baux, was practising shooting at Mentone, he was shot in the spine by the accidental discharge of the harquebus of a soldier against whom he was pitting his skill, and died the following day in agony.

A few days before this tragic happening, so the story goes, the Marquis was reading alone in his library when suddenly he saw a figure standing by his side. "What are you reading?" asked the strange visitant; and when the Marquis answered, the phantom continued, "Read and learn; for you will very soon have no need of either"—with which words it disappeared, "leaving him for a long while filled with terror and perplexity." Under such circumstances of awe and tragedy died Hercules Grimaldi, leaving the way clear to his son's succession to the "throne" of Monaco on the death of his grandfather, the reigning Prince.

As Louis, now Duc de Valentinois, grew up to young manhood, he was no comely youth to win any maid's favour. He is described as fat and short, "with eyes like a white rabbit's, a trumpet

nose and blubber lips." He had hands like a butcher, the straddling gait of a chair-porter, and a red face "which became as livid as a cock's comb on the least provocation." And to this repulsive exterior were allied a violent temper, ridiculous airs of arrogance, coarse appetites and a head as empty as it was vain. "The bear of the Alps," Louis was dubbed, and the description seems to have erred, if at all, on the side of flattery.

Such was the caricature of a prince who, while still in his teens, made clumsy love to Charlotte de Gramont, one of the most beautiful and most imperious young ladies in Europe. The daughter of Antoine de Gramont, twofold prince, duke and Marshal of France, accomplished courtier and *roué*, Charlotte inherited all her father's good looks and all his arrogance. Her mother was Marguerite Duplessis de Chivré, niece of Richelieu, a woman notorious for her lack of the moral sense in an age notorious for its moral laxity, and of whom her own husband declared that "she could give Beelzebub himself fifteen points and a *bisque*."

True child of such parents, Charlotte was no girl to submit tamely to any marriage fetters, however gilded, especially as she was so supremely equipped for conquest. That she was singularly beautiful we know without any evidence of her own; although she has herself supplied a catalogue of her charms which does no more than justice to them.

She dwells lovingly on the grace and exquisite modelling of her figure ; “ her throat and shoulders consummately turned ” ; the glory of her ash-coloured hair ; her black eyes, “ sweet and sparkling ” ; her brilliant complexion, dazzling teeth and crimson lips. “ There is,” she says, “ something very captivating in my smile when I don’t frown—for when I do I am terrifying.” And that she could frown, and frighten by her frowning, we have abundant evidence.

It was Cardinal Mazarin who first suggested to Antoine de Gramont how desirable a thing it would be to secure the heir to Monaco for his son-in-law ; and who arranged their first meeting at Caderousse. To Charlotte no prospect could have been more unwelcome, even if the husband proposed for her had been as well favoured as he was repulsive ; for her heart had already been given to the Duc de Lauzun, by common consent the most handsome and fascinating gallant in France, with a more brilliant record of conquests than any other. “ So intoxicating is his personal charm,” we are told, “ that, in one hour, he can make up to you for an age of torture.” No man less insufferably vain than Louis of Monaco would have dared to enter the lists of love against such a rival as de Lauzun, even if he had had Lauzun’s physical attractions to support his suit.

One would like to have been present at this first

meeting between the "Beauty" and the "Beast," as they were described by one who witnessed it ; and to see the look of scorn and disgust that must have flamed from Charlotte's dark eyes, which could be so "sweet and sparkling" to the incomparable Lauzun. "I could have shrieked," Charlotte declares, "when first I saw the horror who dared to come into my presence as a lover—from his purple face and flabby lips to his uncouth bow and thick, clumsy words of flattery." The Duc de Lauzun was present at the meeting ; and one can imagine the looks that flashed from his eyes to hers. It was not, however, until she had returned to Bisache that the full horror of it all dawned on her. Then, when she realised what it meant to her, she says, "I uttered a cry of terror ; and afterwards laughed until I cried."

There were, indeed, many days of weeping that followed this first revelation of the fate that awaited her. She vowed she would rather die than be wedded to such an ogre ; and when appeals to her mother failed to soften her heart she flew to the arms of her lover and begged him with tears to save her from so terrible a fate. Here at last she found consolation and a hope of escape. De Lauzun swore that she should be no man's wife but his. "Give yourself to me," he said, "and then you will no longer belong to yourself," and listening to the soothing and seductions of the

voice that had won so many hearts, she gladly consented.

“To-morrow night” it was planned that her lover should come and carry her away to happiness with him ; and as pledge of his promise he “tossed in at her window a nosegay wet with morning dew, and, hidden in its leaves, a letter embalmed in flowers of love.” But much was to happen before the morrow dawned. Her father, who had been absent, returned home on that day ; and to him, who had always loved and humoured her, she made a last confident appeal to save her.

But here again, where she had hoped most, she met with a rebuff. “I can well understand,” Antoine de Gramont said to his daughter, “that you cannot love this man. Do you take me for a tyrant ? I don’t force you to care for him. He’s a fool, I know ; a barrel, I see ; a hound, I think. But you must marry him all the same. Become Princess of Monaco ; and after that let *him* be anything that heaven pleases. I sha’n’t care.” In vain she pleaded that she belonged to another, and that she would rather die than marry the Prince. He laughed at her fears, and declined to discuss the matter any further.

To de Lauzun, professing ignorance that he was his daughter’s lover, De Gramont confided that anyone who married Charlotte, in defiance of his wishes, would make a very bad bargain ; for he

would "have nothing but the girl—no money, no influence at Court, no favour"—a prospect which by no means appealed to that most self-seeking of lovers. A few hours later de Lauzun was telling Charlotte, with mock tears in his eyes, that he must renounce his hope of making her happy, and that she must marry the "Bear." For his own sake he would have dared anything; but for hers he must make this great sacrifice!

"It is impossible for anyone to be blinder and sillier than I was," Charlotte writes in her *Memoirs*. "I believed in his tenderness, in his sacrifice. I promised to do what he asked—and from that day I had done with honour; for had I not resolved to give my hand to a man I hated, while I swore to another that I would love him evermore? It was my father's fault. Ah, but he is cruel when he laughs—he is a fiend!"

Never was a more unwilling and unhappy bride led to the altar than Charlotte de Gramont when, one January day in 1660, her ugly prince placed the wedding ring on her finger. Gorgeously arrayed in silver brocade and priceless lace a-shimmer with pearls, a princess's crown on her head, "there was nothing lacking," she says, "except colour in my face." In grotesque contrast to the spectral bride, her black eyes burning in her white face, was the smirking, self-satisfied groom, "whose smile seemed to epitomise all

the idiotic things he had ever said and had still to say."

It was indeed a *mariage pour rive*—or to weep over, according to the mood in which one regards it. Indeed, one cannot resist laughter at the picture of the Prince progressing to his bridal chamber crowned with his bell-nightcap, and followed by a valet and two pages bearing relics, images, lozenges, chaplets and bottles of holy water, all of which must be placed on a table by his bedside, on which two wax candles are burning.

Can we wonder that before dawn came the bride fled from the room and her stertorous companion, to fling herself weeping on the bed of her faithful maid and to forget for a while her misery in sleep. When, at last, she returned to her husband it was to be greeted with a curtain lecture on her duties, and the honour he had bestowed on her. "Corbleu!" he said, as he rubbed his "rabbit's eyes," and stared at her, "Madame, so now you're my wife; and make no mistake—it's a great honour for you. I warn you not to follow in the steps of your grandmothers and aunts, who are all good-for-nothings, or you will find it a very bad lookout, I can tell you."

Whereupon the Princess's pent-up anger blazed forth at last, and in scathing words she let the "Bear" know that it was not she but he who was honoured by their odious union; that she was

every whit as good as himself ; and that, moreover, she was Princess of Monaco, and demanded to be treated as such. The Prince shrivelled up before the lava of white-hot words, and said no more ; and "from that moment," the Princess tells us, "dated the whole course of our common life. . . . Was there ever such a sheep ? I can never think of him, even now, without shame and fury ! "

On one point she was resolute. She would not accompany her hateful husband to Monaco ; she would go to Paris and seek all the distraction that was to be found at Louis' Court ; and in this resolve she had her father's support. Thus we find Charlotte, fresh from her "horrible honeymoon," welcomed with open arms at Versailles and the Tuileries. Monsieur succumbed at once to her beauty, and made open love to her ; Madame, his wife, appointed her "Superintendent of her Household" ; and with the boy-king, Louis XIV., singling her out for special favour, and de Lauzun to console her, she quickly forgot, in the whirl of gaiety and triumphs, the nightmare through which she had just passed.

But such halcyon days were not long to be hers. She found, to her dismay, that she was to become a mother, and it was imperative that the heir to the Grimaldis should be born in their principality. Thus, after much weeping and rebellion, she

suffered herself to be taken to Monaco, where at least she found some compensation for her husband's odious society in the natural beauties which were everywhere around her, and in the humorous contrast between the Prince's regal airs and the ludicrous little kingdom over which he ruled. "A prince's toy," she calls it, with laughter in her pen. "There are three ships which they call a fleet; four guards whom they call an army; ten courtiers whom they call a court."

With the birth of her baby came another change in Charlotte's life; for before the little Antoine was christened (she insisted on calling him "Antoine" after her father, refusing to give him a Grimaldi name) Honoré, the reigning Prince of Monaco, and her husband's grandfather, fell ill, and died in her arms. "I was just beginning to love him," she says, "when God took him away"; and, indeed, he seemed to be a prince worthy of love, for his "death was a personal grief to every one of his subjects." Louis had at last come to his kingdom; Charlotte was now Princess of Monaco; and her baby boy was now Duc de Valentinois. Through the festivities that followed her husband's accession she bore herself worthily as a princess, although she confesses that they "bored her horribly." She had, however, compensation in the attentions of a new lover, M. Biaritz, a man who boasted that his pedigree

was as old as the Pyrenees, and who is said to have been "Byronically beautiful."

But all the time, through all the dreary profusion of festivities and ceremonies, she was "dying to be back in her beloved Paris," where Louis XIV.'s smiles, Monsieur's flatteries and de Lauzun's love awaited her; and when Hortense Mancini, Mazarin's beautiful niece and the Duc de Mazarin's runaway wife, came to Monaco, and began to flirt outrageously with Louis, she found ample excuse, and quickly shook the dust of Monaco off her feet.

Back in Paris, she was able once more to forget her brutish husband and his absurd principality. As for the Prince, he was happily far too well occupied to trouble her with his company, for wherever the Mazarin duchess went he was her shadow, from Rome to London. Thus Charlotte was free to seek her own pleasures; and at the French Court, to a lady so dowered with charms, there was no lack of choice. It was not only Monsieur now and de Lauzun who were her lovers; the King himself, growing weary of La Vallière's placid beauty, began to cast covetous eyes on the Lady of Monaco.

De Lauzun, however, was not the man to submit tamely to being supplanted, even by a king. He was fiercely jealous, and showed it in a hundred ways. Once, we are told, his fury was so great

that "he . . . trampled on the Princess's hand with his high-heeled shoe." On another occasion, when he found her apartment empty and learned that she was with Louis, he "dashed his fist through a mirror and departed, leaving the splintered glass as sole token of his visit." But his sweetest revenge was to follow. One day, learning that the King was awaiting the Princess, he hid himself "in a little room opposite the royal door," and, noticing that the key was on the outside of the door, stealthily turned it, locking his Majesty in, and put it in his pocket.

When, a few minutes later, Charlotte, escorted by Bontemps, Louis' valet, appeared on the scene, he had the satisfaction of hearing her vainly knock for admittance, while the King stormed and raged from inside the room. Of course, the key could not be discovered—it was safe in the chuckling de Lauzun's pocket—and the Princess was at last obliged to retrace her steps, leaving Louis to his impotent anger in his locked chamber. So furious and full of resentment was the King that, it is said, he never smiled on the Princess of Monaco again ; and the jubilant de Lauzun was left in possession of the field.

While the Princess was enjoying herself in Paris—the story of her indiscretions is told at length by Dumas in half-a-dozen volumes, and in many a scandalous pamphlet of the time—her husband was

finding his pleasure in London in the company of the Duchesse de Mazarin, who in some mysterious way (for again it was the wooing of Beauty by the Beast) seems to have been infatuated with him. Indeed, so formidable was his rivalry that Charles II. abandoned the contest and withdrew the lady's pension of four thousand pounds, which the Prince of Monaco undertook to pay in his stead. But the Prince's tenure was short-lived; for Hortense Mancini, never long loyal to any lover, gave him his *congé* in turn, and he returned an angry and disappointed man to the wife who hoped she had seen the last of him.

Another dreary sojourn on the Monaco rock followed, during which the Prince proved himself a more impossible husband than ever—"his jealousy mounting like a pyramid." And once more she escaped to Paris and more congenial company. How she amused herself we may gather from the fact that her husband found a grim satisfaction in hanging her many lovers in effigy all over his small principality. "More than half the men here in Court," Charlotte records, "are decorating the highways of Monaco."

But Madame's reign of pleasure was now nearing its close. She knew that her life was not to be a long one; for had not an astrologer declared, long years before, that she would die young and tragically? And it was at the very zenith of her

gaieties and triumph that the end came. In 1678 she was struck down with smallpox ; and after a brief illness drew her last breath. As she lay dying she called for a mirror ; and as she gazed at her once beautiful face, now swollen and disfigured beyond recognition, she sighed again, “ It is thus that everything changes, everything passes ; and when one thinks it all over, it is not worth while being born.”

CHAPTER XXIII

A PRINCE'S FOLLY

AMONG George III.'s rollicking, hard-swearing, fast-living sons, from George, Prince of Wales, the "First Gentleman" and also the most heartless roué in Europe, to Augustus, Duke of Sussex, not one had a better heart or a more foolish head than Frederick, Duke of York, "the blundering general, the beloved Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the brother with whom," to quote Thackeray, "George IV. had had many a midnight carouse, and who continued his habits of pleasure almost till death seized his fat body."

It was this duke whom Pückler Muskan describes in his Letters as such a powerful toper that "six bottles of claret after dinner scarce made a perceptible change in his countenance."

Like his royal brothers, Frederick's prowess with the wine bottle was at least matched by his passion for women, and he was even more indiscriminate in his choice of the ladies to whom he paid homage; for while the Duke of Sussex was worshipping at the shrine of the lovely Lady Augusta Murray, and his brother of Cumberland was at the feet of his "dear little Angel," my Lady Grosvenor, Frederick

was helpless in the toils of Mistress Mary Anne Clarke, who had a working mason for lawful spouse ; and was writing to her such impassioned letters as this : “ Do me justice, and be convinced that there never was a woman so adored as you are. Every day, every hour convinces me more and more that my whole happiness depends upon you alone. What a time it appears since we parted ; and with what impatience do I look forward to the day after to-morrow ! There are still two whole days before I shall clasp my darling in my arms.”

Who was this woman who, without beauty—for she had little to attract men beyond a pair of dark eyes and a dairymaid buxomness—so enslaved the son of a king that for her sake he faced dishonour ? There are some who say that she had for grandfather none other than Theodore I., King of Corsica, the monarch who spent the last months of his life in a London gaol, a prisoner for debt ; and who, a few days after recovering his liberty, died at the house of a Soho tailor without a sixpence to contribute to his funeral expenses.

But a more prosaic genealogy assigns no such romantic and exalted origin to Mary Anne Clarke. She was, in fact, cradled either at London or Oxford, and was the daughter of a man named Thompson, whose widow, when Mary Anne was but a child, took for second husband one Farquhar, a London compositor. Of her early years of obscurity little

is known beyond the fact that, before she had emerged from girlhood, scandal began to be busy with her name and that of a Golden Lane pawnbroker, whom she captivated with her dark eyes, her merry laugh, and her saucy little face, with its *retroussé* nose and red pouting lips. Before she had seen her sixteenth birthday, however, she had turned a cold shoulder on the amorous pawnbroker, and had allowed a good-looking young mason, named Clarke, to place a wedding ring on her finger in St Pancras Church.

In such rather sordid fashion did life open for the woman who was fated to enslave a royal prince. Had Mary Anne Clarke found happiness in her wedded life, her story would have died with her. But there was no happiness to be found with the young mason, who, by the time his wife was twenty, had brought four years of drunken and dissolute living to a close in bankruptcy. Wearying of her sottish husband, disgusted by his brutality, Mrs Clarke ran away from her poverty-stricken home, and determined to open a new chapter on her own account.

For a time we find her living quietly in a Wiltshire town with a "barrister and baronet" for protector. But such prosaic living was little to the taste of the emancipated wife, who found her baronet even more dull than the small provincial town to which he had brought her. "It is prob-



Mary Anne Clarke.

able," to quote the " Authentic Memoirs," " that the uncouth jargon of the law took the place of the soft whispers of love, and her baronet was oftener poring over parchment than feasting on the damask cheek of his fair protégée." But, whatever the reason, the scene was quickly changed ; and we find her back in London coquetting with a variety of new lovers. Now it is two more baronets, Sir Charles Milner and Sir James Brudenell, the latter of whom takes alarm when she presents to him a bill for lace to the amount of two hundred pounds. Now it is a fashionably dressed " macaroni " whom she met one evening in Vauxhall Gardens, and with whom she spends a few weeks in a rustic cottage in Bayswater, until she discovers that the gentleman of fashion and family, which he affected to be, is in reality a cardsharper and a notorious rascal, and she leaves him to the undisturbed enjoyment of the cottage.

But Mary Anne never had any lack of lovers to succeed each other. To the discredited " macaroni " succeeded Mr Dowler, a young " blood " of the city, and son of a wealthy wine merchant, a gallant who at least had a long purse to satisfy her extravagant tastes ; and it was with the fine feathers provided so generously by the foolish, infatuated city youth that she made her first dashing appearance at Brighton. Here, a chronicler of the time tells us, she created a great sensation among the dashing

Cyprians ; and “ distinguished herself as an excellent swimmer, and occasionally used to float upon the liquid element, to the astonishment and admiration of the spectators.”

It is difficult, and perhaps not necessary, to follow the erratic Mrs Clarke through her bewildering changes of lovers and habitations. Among the former we find Lords Barrymore and Londonderry, and an army agent described as Mr “ O,” each of whom fell for a time under the spell of her dark eyes and clever tongue. Captain Gronow speaks of her at this time as a lady of charming manners, and a brilliant talker. “ Her great failing was a want of care in the management of her tongue, which spared friend no more than foe.” But wherever her vagrant fancy took her—London, Paris or Brighton—she was always surrounded by her court of admirers.

In London we find her, in 1803, established, at the expense of the mysterious Mr “ O,” in a handsome house in Tavistock Place ; and it was probably in this year that the Duke of York first set eyes on her. Whether the first meeting was, as some say, on the Old Steyne at Brighton, or, as others equally confidently assert, in Tavistock Place, we know that the susceptible Frederick was quick to succumb to her opulent and flamboyant charms ; and that within a few weeks she was installed by him as mistress of a still finer house in Gloucester

Place, Portman Square, with the " Prince-Bishop " hourly dancing attendance on her.

The mason's wife had now reached a much more splendid goal than any she had dared to dream of. As avowed mistress of the King's son, Commander-in-Chief of England's army, she lived in an environment of luxury such as any royal lady might have envied. She was daily served, we are told, by twenty servants, of whom two were butlers and three were cooks. More than a thousand pounds went yearly in wages alone. Her furniture was the most sumptuous money could buy. Her service of plate was formerly the property of the Duc de Berri ; the pierglasses in the reception-room cost four hundred pounds ; and she drank out of wineglasses bought at two guineas apiece. In her stables were ten horses and two coaches. And when London palled she had a cosy retreat at Weybridge, with another large staff of servants to do her bidding.

One thousand pounds a month was her regal allowance for current expenses—a sum, she contemptuously told the Duke, barely sufficient to pay the bill for wages and liveries. After the first few months clamorous creditors were seldom off her doorstep ; and she confessed she felt as poor as in the days when she was the drunken mason's wife in a London slum. Again and again she had to appeal for loans to the wine merchant's son, who was still her devoted lover ; and more than once it was

Mr Dowler's money which sent the bailiffs packing when they had laid hands on some of the lady's property to satisfy a long-overdue claim.

But Mrs Clarke was not the woman to tolerate long such an absurd state of things. Her lover was a royal prince, the head of the army, and through him there was much gold to be gleaned by clever hands such as hers. Her good friend Mr Dowler, for instance, coveted a post in the Army Commissariat. A word to the Duke, who was her slave, was sufficient to procure the office. The word was quickly spoken ; Mr Dowler received the coveted appointment ; and her promised reward took the gratifying form of a thousand pounds. Here, then, was a rich harvest to be reaped, and she meant to reap it. What she could do to oblige Mr Dowler, she could do for any one of the large army of office-seekers.

Army commissions, for instance, were costly luxuries in those days. The regulation price for a majority was two thousand six hundred pounds, for a captaincy one thousand five hundred pounds. She could supply the market cheaper than that ; her royal lover would write his autograph on as many commissions as she wanted ; and thus she was soon dispensing majorities at nine hundred pounds, and captaincies at seven hundred pounds, and so on (all less than half-price) ; and was filling

her coffers with gold won by a few coaxing words and endearments.

If the Commander-in-Chief were not in an amiable mood, it is said, she adopted the simple expedient of forging his signature to the required papers. Indeed, she made so little concealment of her skill with the pen that, on one occasion, she proudly showed to a Mr Town the autograph of the Duke of York and her own imitation of it, so cleverly done that it was impossible to say which was the real signature and which the forgery.

And this wholesale dispensing of commissions was but one of many new sources of revenue which fed her extravagance. When, in 1804, a Colonel French was anxious to conduct a levy of a regiment for service, she procured the favour for him in return for five hundred pounds down and a guinea out of the bounty for each recruit. In fact, there was scarcely an office of profit, from a barrack-mastership to a deanery or bishopric, which this friend of the Duke was not ready to procure in return for a very substantial fee. But there were limits to the patience of even such a long-suffering man as Frederick, Duke of York. The time arrived when all Mrs Clarke's wiles and coquetries failed to blind him to the dangers of the path along which she was leading him. It is more than probable, too, that he had grown weary of his buxom charmer

of the scathing tongue. At any rate, he authorised his agent, Mr Adam, to inform her that he proposed to break off personal relations with her, and to offer her an annuity of four hundred pounds, so long as she conducted herself becomingly, to leave him. This offer Mrs Clarke scornfully refused ; but realising at last that her reign was over, she agreed to accept it, and withdrew into Devonshire. The Duke, however, was not to escape so easily ; for, when her annuity, as was inevitable with such a spendthrift, fell into arrear she began to reveal the tigress that was in her.

Collecting all the letters the Prince had written to her, she threatened to publish them, together with her own private memoranda, unless the arrears were promptly paid. Not content with this threat, alarming enough in itself, she wrote to the Prince of Wales a full account of his brother's treatment of her. The Duke was, at last, to pay the full price of his folly and infatuation. There had long been a growing indignation at his gross mismanagement of the army, and at the wholesale corruption for which it was known the Commander-in-Chief was largely responsible ; and Colonel Wardle and Sir Francis Burdett were delighted to discover in Mrs Clarke such an invaluable ally in the attack they intended to make on the Duke. In return for information which she gladly supplied, she was promised five thousand pounds down, and payment

of all her debts, an annuity of four hundred pounds and a furnished house.

Thus equipped with the most damning evidence, Colonel Wardle brought forward his motion in 1809. The inquiry lasted seven weeks, during which Mrs Clarke was constantly called to give evidence, a duty in which she revelled.

The Duke was acquitted, by a majority of eighty-two, of " personal corruption " ; but his discarded mistress had ample revenge, for after the shameful disclosures at the trial he found it prudent to resign his post at the head of the army. But her satisfaction was qualified when she discovered that neither the annuity, the payment of her debts, nor the five thousand pounds was forthcoming ; and that she herself had to pay the bill for the furnished house !

Her best card, however, still remained unplayed. There was a small fortune, beyond a doubt, in the bundles of the Duke's letters to her, and her comments on them ; and these she now meant to publish to the world. Eighteen thousand copies were printed, and were just about to be published when the news came to the ears of the Duke of York. There was no time to be lost ; and before another hour had passed Sir Herbert Taylor had an interview with Mrs Clarke, the result of which was highly gratifying to both. The eighteen thousand volumes were reduced to ashes ; and in exchange for the

“ burnt offering ” the editress received ten thousand pounds in good gold, an undertaking for a life annuity of four hundred pounds for herself, and two hundred pounds for each of her daughters, with a promise that her son should be provided for.

Thus the curtain was rung down on the drama of a prince's folly and a woman's greed. Mrs Clarke made but one more public appearance, when, in 1814, she was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for writing a libellous letter. The remainder of her long life of seventy-six years she spent in quiet and respectable retirement, devoting her time to the education of her children ; and she drew the last breath of her strangely romantic life at Boulogne, one June day in 1852.

CHAPTER XXIV

A QUEEN OF TRAGEDY

ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR, Queen of Tragedy and of Tears ; Queen also of Beauty and of Love. With all the equipment for conquering the world, she seemed fated from her birth to drink the cup of success, and to find it always bitter to the taste. While the world of Paris was at the feet of the greatest tragic actress of her century, and while lovers were struggling for her smiles, she was vowing that she was weary of life.

“ A vindictive and jealous goddess,” she wrote, towards the end of her brief day of triumph and tribulation, “ presided over my cradle, and directed my destiny with a pitiless violence of persecution.”

And yet this self-avowed victim of an unkind Fate had to thank Fortune for a dower such as falls to the lot of few of her sex. She had a liberal endowment of the beauty which woman most covets ; she had a genius for acting which made her famous throughout the world while still little beyond the threshold of womanhood ; and she had also a singular power to charm and to make friends. But all these gifts of the gods were neutralised and turned to bitterness and vanity by a temperament

which saw only calamity in conquest and mingled triumph with tears.

It was probably from her father that Adrienne inherited the mental gloom which spoiled her life ; for Monsieur Lecouvreur was a man of unbalanced brain, who alternated between profound fits of depression and insane outbursts of rage. He was hopelessly mad when he died. To her mother she owed her beauty and her brilliant gifts.

Adrienne was cradled under a very humble roof, one day in the year 1692, with poverty for nurse, and the sordid for her environment. Her father was a journeyman-hatter of Daméry, who, after helpless wanderings in search of work, drifted finally to Paris when his daughter was still a child, remarkable only for a gift of acting, which amazed her poor neighbours. And such was the infection of her enthusiasm that, by the time she was thirteen, she was manageress of a small troupe of schoolfellows who, after careful rehearsing, produced a play and an after-piece in a room lent for the purpose by a sympathetic grocer in the rue Ferou in the Temple Quartier. The play was nothing less ambitious than Corneille's *Polyeucte*, and the after-piece was *Le Diable*, a mournful drama.

Thus early Tragedy had marked the hatter's daughter for her own, and thus early she began to display those wonderful histrionic gifts which, within twelve years, were to make her one of the

greatest tragediennes the world had seen. So remarkable was the child's presentment of Pauline in *Polyeucte* that night after night the grocer's room was packed to suffocation by audiences now melted to tears, now roused to frenzies of applause. The fame of her genius went through Paris ; and soon Court ladies were flocking, with fashionable actors and actresses, to see the " gutter girl " who promised to become " the greatest actress Paris had ever known." Such, in fact, was the pilgrimage to the rue Ferou that the " theatre " was soon hopelessly too small, and it became necessary to seek more spacious quarters. These were provided by the generosity of a Madame Du Gué, who placed the courtyard of her big house in the rue Garancière at the service of the youthful troupe.

But Adrienne's triumph was destined to an abrupt and early end. The jealousy of the players of the Théâtre Français was roused to such a pitch that the help of the law was invoked to suppress this " illicit " theatre, which was taking their best patrons to the Paris slums ; and one night the police appeared in the rue Garancière to close its doors. For a time Adrienne transferred her troupe to the Temple precincts, where she could defy the police ; but the glamour was gone, and after a few more days of struggling existence the play was withdrawn.

Although Adrienne's first dramatic venture had thus closed in defeat, her reputation as a trage-

dienne of phenomenal promise survived ; and when, in 1706, she left her home for the life of a strolling actress, she was rapturously received wherever she went, from Luneville and Strasburg to Nancy and Verdun. By the time she was nineteen she was actress at the Lorraine Court ; and was also drawing a salary of two hundred livres a year at Strasburg.

But still she was not happy. The applause and flatteries of her countless admirers were powerless to make her indifferent to the disagreeables in her life. Every exhibition of jealousy wounded her ; she shrank from the familiarities of the actors who were her associates, and the discomforts of her journeys and lodgings. She fumed and fretted against the Fate which so long withheld her from the supreme position which she knew was hers by the right of genius.

Even love brought her no compensating satisfaction. “ What is there to live for,” she once said at this time, “ without love ? ” And yet, when love came to her with open arms, she either rejected it or found no pleasure in it. D’Argental, a man of handsome exterior and brilliant gifts, was her veriest slave, following her wherever she went, helping her, and protecting her with the most chivalrous devotion. She accepted all his services ; but she would listen to no vows of love, though they were those of an honest man, whose only wish was to call her

“ wife.” To many another, infinitely less worthy, she conceded everything woman should hold most dear. She gave her love to a rascally baron who had a wife in Picardy ; and when he died she shed many tears over his loss—until the good-looking and graceless Philippe le Roy, a Lothario from Lorraine, came to take his place in her affections and to become father of her child.

When she grew weary of le Roy, it was Clavel, the actor, whom she took to her arms, and alternately dazzled with her smiles and bedewed with her tears ; for her love, like her whole life, was ever lachrymose. Such was the spell which Clavel cast over her that she would gladly have made a husband of him, had he met her less than halfway.

She even humbled herself to him in an abject and pathetic letter, in which she wrote, “ Do not spare me. Promise nothing that you are not prepared to perform, even if you promise to hate me. That is better than being deceived. I care more for your interests than for my own. . . . Follow your inclination without too much thought of the consequences. I shall play my part whether I keep you or lose you. If I lose you I shall hope that it may not be entirely : that I shall still have a little of your esteem. If you are happy, I shall be glad to know that I have not stood in your way, and if you are not, it will not be I who have made you unhappy—and so I shall try to console myself.”

But even such an appeal as this was wasted on Clavel, who, while quite ready to play the rôle of lover, was by no means disposed to place a wedding ring on Adrienne's finger. Then it was that, disillusioned once more, she wrote bitterly, "I am utterly sick of love, and feel greatly tempted to have done with it for the rest of my life ; for, after all, I have no wish to die or to go mad." She wiped her tears away, however, when Monsieur de Klinglin, one of Strasburg's magnates, came a-wooing. But again her evil fate pursued her ; for after a few weeks of dalliance the Strasburg magnate withdrew his affection, and in disgust she retired to Paris, to forget her grief in pursuit of the fame which she knew would be hers in the French capital.

She was now at the zenith of her powers, and Paris received its prodigal daughter, who had stayed too long away, with open arms. Nor was its high expectation falsified ; for at her first appearance at the Comédie Française, in the part of Monime, her triumph was immediate, electrical. A new planet had swum into the firmament of the stage, eclipsing all other luminaries. No actress had ever had such power to move by a sigh, to thrill by a glance or to terrify by a cry. All Paris was at the feet of the woman who was such a sublime incarnation of Tragedy ; and for thirteen years she retained her supremacy, unapproached and unapproachable. "There are four marvels in Paris,"

d'Allainval wrote to an English friend ; and among the four he placed Mademoiselle Lecouvreur second only to the Tuileries ; and Voltaire wrote of her as the woman who " in Greece would have had altars erected in her honour."

Copvel painted a charming picture of her at this time, as Cordelia. This portrait, which, unfortunately, only survives in an engraving, reveals a woman daintily fashioned, from her small, gracefully poised head to her prettily moulded arms and delicate fingers, with large, upturned eyes, full of an unspeakable sorrow. " Infinitely elegant and gracious," " full of charm, subtlety and delicacy," " a small and exquisite creature"—such are the words in which her contemporaries describe her.

Adrienne had now reached the goal of her ambition. She was universally acknowledged the greatest actress of her day ; she was the idol of the Paris populace, and the pet of its ladies ; and her *salon* was crowded with the rank and fashion of France. But even now, when life should have been all sunshine, happiness eluded her. There is an undercurrent of sadness in her brightest letters. The evil goddess who had seated herself beside her cradle was still, she was convinced, pursuing her, tincturing all her successes with disappointment.

" You think I am happy, the most enviable of my sex," she wrote to a friend of her earlier years. " Do you know, I would gladly exchange all my so-

called triumphs for a year of the time you remember when I was playing at acting in the rue Ferou." A word or a look of jealousy could make her miserable for a week ; and even her friendships, which she prized more than all her success on the stage and in society, brought her, she said, " more pain than pleasure."

But still there was love, which, in spite of her experience, she considered the one thing worth living for—and love still continued to fail her, though it came in such seductive guises as my Lord Peterborough and Maurice de Saxe, the greatest soldier and one of the handsomest men of his day.

Maurice de Saxe, future Marshal of France, had for father Augustus the Second, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and for mother the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck, one of Sweden's most beautiful daughters. From his father he inherited the gigantic frame and brawny muscles which made Augustus famous in Europe as " the Strong " ; to his mother he owed his good looks ; and to both parents that strain of romance and adventure which made him notorious as the Prince of Lotharios.

Never was man better equipped for the conquest of woman, and never was woman more speedily conquered than Adrienne Lecouvreur. From the moment of their first meeting in 1721 there was only one man in all the world for her. In comparison

with the ardour of this new passion all her past affairs of the heart were as night to day. She was dazzled by the splendour of her new lover—his handsome face, his stalwart figure, his air of virility and command, his semi-royal rank. That he was younger than herself by a few years mattered nothing to her—and seemingly as little to him, for there could be no question of his devotion.

Thus passed three years of the greatest happiness she had known, disturbed, it is true, by her lover's infidelities, of which he made no concealment. Disloyal as he was, he always returned penitent to her arms ; and was always assured of forgiveness. Three such years of modified bliss, and then her dream came to its awakening. Maurice must leave her. The Duchy of Courland was in the market, and he was determined that he would be the new Duke ; for, in spite of his bar sinister, his ambition always soared to a throne.

There were many tears at the parting ; but, after all, it was but for a time, and Maurice would come back to her with his new dignity. He vowed it on his knees. Meanwhile she could help him ; and this she did by selling every jewel she possessed, and giving him the proceeds, forty thousand livres, as a parting present. But Maurice Saxe was as false in love as he was brave in war ; and soon stories came to Adrienne of his flirtations with one fair lady after another in distant Courland, to two

of whom—the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Petrovna and Anna Ivanovna, widow of the late Duke—he had even offered marriage.

For once, however, de Saxe's good fortune was to fail him. He missed his way both to the duchy and the altar ; and once more came back, a penitent, to the woman he had betrayed, who again received him with arms of welcome. And again she had the same reward, of infidelities conducted under her very eyes, until at last her long forbearance was broken down, and she wrote to her old lover, d'Argental, still faithful to her, " I am distracted with rage and wretchedness. It is natural to cry out against such falseness. This man *ought* to know me, ought to love me—oh, my God ! what am I to do ? "

The limits of her patience had been reached at last, after seven years of such perfidy ; and the end came when de Saxe began to pay attentions to the Duchesse de Bouillon, the most disreputable woman at Louis' Court. Then it was that, when playing in *Phèdre*, she turned her flaming eyes on the woman who had supplanted her, and hurled at her the scathing words of her part, " I am not one of those brazen women who, tasting a shameful peace in crime, can show to the world a face which knows not how to blush." The Duchesse left the theatre with the thunders of sympathetic applause in her ears.

But the curtain was soon to fall on the brief drama (tragedy she would have called it) of Adrienne's life. One March day in 1730 Paris was shocked to learn that the great actress was dead—that she had died suddenly, tragically. There were whispers of poison, which soon took the form of circumstantial tales. She had been poisoned by the Duchesse de Bouillon, in revenge for the public insult she had inflicted on her. And support was lent to the accusation by the fact that it was not the first time the Duchesse had been suspected of thus getting rid of someone she hated. But a few weeks earlier Paris had been horrified by a similar crime. A woman whom the Duchesse was known to hate had died after eating a poisoned lozenge.

This time, however, Paris was wrong. For many months Adrienne's health had been failing. "It drives me to despair," she had written to a friend. She had had more than one severe attack of dysentery; and it was dysentery that attacked her again on 15th March 1730, when she was playing in Voltaire's *Œdype*. Although she was in agony she played her part bravely to the end. Then she fainted, and was carried home, where, four days later, she "went out like a candle"! •

During her last hours a priest vainly urged her to repent, so that he might administer the last Sacrament. To all his pleading and threats she returned a refusal; and with a last effort raised herself in

bed, and, pointing with outstretched hand to a bust of Maurice de Saxe, said proudly, "There is my world, my hope, and my God!"

Thus impenitent and loving to the last died Adrienne Lecouvreur at the very zenith of her powers and her triumphs. Among the last words she uttered were these, "I am glad to go from a world in which nothing seems ever to go right with me." Her fatal pessimism followed her to the end; the ill-luck she bemoaned pursued her still further—to the grave itself; for Christian burial was denied her, and her body, wrapped in a sheet and coffinless, was carried at dead of night to a waste piece of land on the bank of the Seine, and buried there without a word of benediction or farewell.

Many years later her sordid resting-place was discovered by d'Argental, who placed over it a tablet of marble, on which were inscribed tender verses in memory of the woman he had loved so loyally and so vainly. As for de Saxe, who gave a further proof of his heartlessness by selling her horses almost before the breath had left her body, he got his Courland dukedom and his marshal's baton; and, after making Europe ring with the fame of his martial exploits, died, full of honours, a score of years after the woman who had given her all to him was flung into a nameless grave.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ROMANCE OF A TSAR

WHEN Alexander I. first opened his eyes on the world it was to the thunder of two hundred cannon from the fortress of Peter and Paul, and to the clashing of bells from every steeple in St Petersburg. Solemn services of thanksgiving were held ; odes were composed in honour of the Tsar-to-be ; and from one end of Russia to the other the wave of rejoicing flowed.

As for Catherine, the Empress, she was beside herself with joy at the birth of a grandson, who should succeed to her throne and perpetuate her glories. She had never made any concealment of a dislike, amounting almost to hatred, of her son Paul, Alexander's father ; or of her desire, if possible, to exclude him from the crown. Now, at last, she was assured of a successor after her heart ; for she meant to train the royal infant to walk worthily in her own footsteps.

" I warrant," she wrote to Grimm, when the child had not been many days in his cradle, " that you know nothing about Monsieur Alexander. It is not Alexander the Great ; do not imagine it ; but a very small Alexander, who was only born on the

twelfth of this month." And a year later she wrote, " You must know that when you speak of Monsieur Alexander you touch a weak spot in me. I dote upon him ; and I intend, if possible, to have him always with me. He has the pleasant temper of a child in good health, is full of high spirits, ingratiating in manner, and as beautiful as a little god of love. Everybody is fond of him, I more than others, and I can do anything I like with him."

Every letter of the Empress is equally eloquent of her devotion to the little Alexander—of his good looks, his winning ways, his extraordinary intelligence. Now she is teaching him his A B C, and he only a year and a half old ! And now she is planting moral maxims in his little head, or looking rapturously on as his portrait is being painted. " May God bless M. Alexander," she exclaims, " who is, and always will be, the first-born in everything—in mind and will ! . . . If he does not get on in the world, I do not know who would. I am mistaken if the beauty of mind and soul will not equal that of his body."

Such, in the doting words of his grandmother, was the son of Paul, " the mad Tsar," and grandson of Peter III., " drunkard and imbecile," each of whom had closed a turbulent reign in tragedy—one, strangled by assassins in his own bedroom, while his wife battered vainly at the locked door ; the other (Peter III.) foully assassinated, if not at

Catherine's instigation, at least with her tacit consent. It was a pitiful heritage for any child ; and, with the taint of insanity and tragedy in his blood, Alexander could scarcely hope for a normal life—nor, as we shall see, did he have it.

That, however, his childhood was full of promise there can be no doubt. He was, in fact, all that his grandmother Catherine painted him. He was beautiful as a child of love or of dreams ; at four years, so precocious was he, he could read German and chatter fluently in French and English ; and he had the sweetest of dispositions. "He does not know what it is to be ill-tempered ; and how obedient, how fond of giving, especially to those who are in want ; how grateful to those about him ; how ready to do good, and yet never idle or unoccupied for a single moment." We see this prodigy of four mixing colours, chopping wood, cleaning the furniture, acting as coachman or groom, teaching himself to read, write, draw and count ; always merry, always occupied—a sturdy, healthy, beautiful and winsome boy.

And thus, idolised by his grandmother, petted and spoilt by every Court lady, he grew up to handsome youth, ruling all by his loveliness and accepting their homage as his due. It was perhaps only natural that a boy so fascinating should be in danger in a Court to which his grandmother still set such an example of loose morals. Although

more than forty years had gone since Soltykoff and Poniatowski made such open love to Peter's wife, she was still not too old to find pleasure in dallying with their remote successors, and found Zubov as irresistible as ever was Gregory Orloff or Patiomkin.

But, although she allowed herself such licence, and set such a sorry example of living, she was frankly alarmed at the similar dangers which now threatened her good-looking grandson, who was already beginning to show too much pleasure in the society of her maids-of-honour.

"One thing," she confesses, "causes me anxiety—the danger he incurs with regard to women. They all run after him, which is natural ; for everybody is attracted by his fascinating appearance. What is more, he is unaware of his good looks, and seems, so far, to care little about his appearance." Already, when Alexander was still little advanced in his teens, there were smiles and whisperings at Court which had their inspiration in the Prince's precocious gallantry. The hereditary instinct was strong in him. Every one of his ancestors had been a "ladies' man," and Alexander had the same blood in his young veins, allied to a greater power to charm than any one of them ever possessed. And all the wise counsel and warnings of his tutors, La Harpe and Soltykoff, were powerless to lead his footsteps in less perilous paths.

It was clearly time that a wife should be found

for her too volatile grandson, Catherine was quick to decide, when even his tutor reported to her, "The Grand Duke is growing lazy. Physical desires are manifesting themselves, which are constantly increasing in a measure as the Prince often converses with good-looking women." Even Napoleon, when he was staying at Vilna, remarked on Alexander's attraction. "He is exceedingly amiable," he said to the Lithuanian ladies. "I can see that he has turned all your heads and won all your hearts."

Thus it was that, in 1792, when the Grand Duke was but fifteen, Count Roumyanzev was despatched in haste to the courts of Europe in search of a suitable bride for him, to return a few months later bringing with him, from Baden, two charming young girls, the Princesses Louisa and Frederika, of whom the elder was only fourteen. "As for the young man," Catherina wrote to Grimm, "he is quite ignorant of all that is going on, in his innocence of heart. It is a diabolical trick I am playing him."

But in spite, possibly because, of his ignorance the Grand Duke was quick to find one at least of the Baden princesses, Louisa, very fair to look upon ; and he was at a loss to understand why, when she first saw him, she turned pale and began to tremble. He did not know with what dread she had come to Russia ; how, when she was leaving her childhood's

home, she had tried to fling herself out of the carriage ; and how, when she saw the mountains of her native land sinking below the horizon behind her, she had stretched her arms to them in vain appeal and farewell.

She was a reluctant bride to come to the arms of any prince, however charming ; but at least her lover appeared to be devoted to her, everyone was kind, and the Empress almost smothered her with affection. Catherine, in fact, was delighted with the Baden princess, as also was Alexander's mother, Maria Feodorovna, who declared, " She is not only beautiful, but from her whole figure there emanates a charm which wins the heart of the most indifferent ; she captivates with her amiability and her candour " ; while Catherine jubilantly wrote, " Two angels have been engaged to each other. There is nothing so beautiful as the fiancé of fifteen and his fiancée of fourteen. Besides, they are in love with each other."

The betrothal was celebrated with a brilliant sequence of banquets and balls ; and the marriage with a pomp and splendour such as St Petersburg had rarely witnessed. Seldom has wedded life opened with a fairer prospect. But almost before the honeymoon had waned the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Alexevna (the name by which she was henceforth to be known) knew that her forebodings were to be realised after all. The Prince's brief

infatuation gave place to indifference, and then to a marked neglect of his young bride. He would leave her to weep alone in her apartments while he sought his pleasure with his boon companions of both sexes. Even his studies no longer had any attraction for him. He flung his books aside to share the pranks of his comrades, any wild escapade that the mood prompted.

He would even find his pleasure in the company of his servants, sharing their games and dissipations, and associating with them on terms of the utmost familiarity. And when he had a small theatre installed in the palace the gulf between himself and his wife grew still wider ; for he found dallying with pretty actresses much more to his taste than the company of a Grand Duchess whose silence was a reproach, and her tears a depression.

Wounded by her husband's neglect, and outraged by his infidelity, Elizabeth's pride would not permit her to make any effort to win back his love. She took refuge in an affected indifference ; and, while forcing herself to appear gay to the world, she was seen more than once with tears streaming down her cheeks, gazing at the portrait of the man she loved, woman-like, all the more that he cared nothing for her.

Meanwhile, Alexander found abundant solace in one liaison after another. For eleven years one woman, the wife of a Court official, held him in

thrall, and became mother of three children, of whom two died in infancy. On the third child, who grew up to beautiful girlhood, he lavished the tenderest affection long after he had wearied of her faithless mother ; in fact, she was the chief object of his love and devotion to the last hour when she was tragically taken from him.

As the years passed, the morbid nature which he had inherited from his father began to manifest itself more and more. He found no happiness in his position as heir to a great throne, or in his splendid prospect. " I am not suited for a Court life," he wrote in 1794. " I am not made for the high position I now hold, and still less for that which is reserved for me in the future, and from which I have sworn to myself to escape in some way or other. My plan is, when the time comes, to retire with my wife to the shores of the Rhine, there to lead the quiet life of a retired individual." And when, a little later, he came under the influence of Baroness Kruedener, pietist and mystic, his revulsion against the hollowness of courts and the vanities of the world was complete. He was filled with horror at the life he had been leading ; and from that time the most beautiful of women smiled on him in vain.

The fate he dreaded was now very near to him. One morning, in 1801, Valerian knocked at his door and informed him that " all was over."

“What is over?” demanded the startled Grand Duke. “Your father is dead, and you are Emperor.” Then he knew that his father had been done to death; and in his horror he exclaimed, “I will not accept a crown stained with blood.” He had known that a plot was on foot to assassinate the Tsar, and had spoken no word to stay it. And now the curse had come upon him. From this hour there was to be no more peace for him. “His grief and remorse,” says Czartorysky, “were inexpressibly deep and touching. He continually saw in his imagination the mutilated body of his father, and his mental tortures never ceased. For hours he remained alone, sitting in silence, with fixed and haggard looks.”

He refused to leave his room; and was dragged, pale and semi-conscious, into the presence of his soldiers, to receive their oath of allegiance. And when, later, he looked on his father's distorted, mangled face, and his mother, turning to him, said in a voice of terrible reproach, “Now I wish you joy; you are Emperor,” he gave a heart-broken cry, and fell to the floor in a dead faint. Under such tragic conditions did Alexander I. come to the throne of Russia, as pitiful and unwilling a sovereign as ever put on a crown.

Even in the brilliant and sumptuous festivals that accompanied his crowning, and with the acclamations of his subjects in his ears, he could not

for a moment shake off the gloom that lay so heavily on him. He felt himself branded the murderer of his father ; and all the rejoicing of Russia was powerless to give him a moment's pleasure. But there was a heavy task awaiting him, and he must at any cost to himself face it. He stopped the war with England, and entered into treaties with France and Sweden and Persia. He sheathed the sword which his father had so ruthlessly drawn ; and in its place inaugurated an era of peace.

In his own empire one reform quickly succeeded another, while Europe looked on in wonder and applause at the revolution the young monarch was working. But through it all he carried a heavy heart and a tortured conscience, which gave him no moment's rest. He was haunted day and night by the phantoms of his unbalanced brain, and by the fear that he could never make peace with God ; and he would frequently retire in the midst of a brilliant reception to pray and weep in his private oratory.

Thus the years passed. The golden dawn of his reign faded quickly, and war succeeded war—against France, England, Sweden, Turkey, the very countries to which he had offered the hand of friendship. Then, to crown his misfortunes and his failures, his beloved natural daughter, now grown to lovely young womanhood, died of consumption on the very eve of her marriage. When

the terrible news came to him, as he was reviewing his Guards, the Emperor "began to tremble violently, while a deathlike pallor overspread his face." He had, however, sufficient self-control to allow the Guards to continue their parade ; but he was overheard to say, "The punishment of my sins has now fallen upon me."

It was, he felt, a judgment of God for the sins he had committed against the wife who had been so patient and forgiving ; and it was to her that he now turned for comfort in the hour of his great sorrow. Nor did he turn in vain, for Elizabeth took him gladly to her heart, and from that moment of forgiveness they were inseparable.

But more trouble was in store for Alexander. His wife's health, undermined by years of suffering, began to break down ; the doctors, powerless to check the chest affection which had attacked her, decided that she must seek a warmer climate, and advised her to go to her native Baden. The Tsar insisted on accompanying her, and after twenty days of travelling they reached Taganrog, where, as Elizabeth seemed much stronger, he left her for a visit to the Crimea and Eupatoria. When at last he returned to Taganrog, worn out by the fatigues and hardships of his long journey, he was attacked by typhoid fever, and, to his wife's intense grief, was soon at death's door. The doctors were powerless to save him, and on the 1st of December

(1825), after kissing Elizabeth's hand in loving and everlasting farewell, he breathed his last.

"Our angel is in heaven—and I remain on earth," Elizabeth wrote, a few days later, to the Empress Maria Feodorovna. "Who could have believed that I, weak and sickly as I am, would have been the one to survive? . . . Since my terrible loss, one thought alone has had any power to comfort me, and that is that I cannot long outlive him. I cherish the hope of being ere long reunited to him." That hope was soon to be fulfilled, for within five months Elizabeth, too, was at rest.

Such is the story of Alexander's death which was generally accepted. But was he really dead? It is significant that, although his coffin was exposed in the Kazan Cathedral for seven days, no one was allowed to look on the face of the dead man in it; the reason assigned for the refusal being "the change in the face of the deceased, which had turned black already at Taganrog." Many resolutely refused to believe that the closed coffin held the Tsar's body, remembering as they did his vow "to escape in some way or other" from the burden of his crown.

Nearly forty years later, on the 20th of January 1864, to quote Dr Rappoport, "there died in Tomsk, at the age of eighty-seven, a hermit of the name of Feodor Konsmitsh. He had been surrounded by the aureole of saintliness. He was of

tall stature and imposing demeanour. His manner was gentle, but often his glance became severe and commanding. Eye-witnesses who had known Alexander I. maintained that the saintly hermit was none other than the autocrat of Russia ; and photographs of the celebrated hermit standing in his cell, clad in a long white garment, showed a striking resemblance to the late Emperor."

Was this, then, the real end of the Emperor who, wearied of the high position for which he was "not made," pursued by phantoms of remorse for a misspent life, had escaped from the world to spend the remainder of his days in prayer and penitence in a hermit's cell ?

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ENCHANTER OF MEN

NINON DE LENCLOS—a perfume, sweet and delicate, still clings to the name, although the woman who bore it has been dust these two centuries. For half-a-dozen generations women have sought to emulate her loveliness with blooms and powders which perpetuate her name ; but it needs no such flattering tribute of her sex to preserve the memory of one of the most beautiful and graceful women who have ever lured men by the magic of their charms.

To this day no one can claim to understand the bewitching and fascinating lady who played such havoc with the hearts and senses of men while our Stuart kings were wearing their crowns. She was an inscrutable problem in her own time ; her charms defied description, as her complex and contradictory character eluded analysis. And she still remains, as she must ever remain, an enigma.

The most seductive of women, her greatest ambition was to “ be a man ” ; the envy and despiser of her own sex, she never scrupled to betray its weaknesses to the very men whom she enslaved by their exercise ; the child of an austere pious mother, she scoffed at religion ; to the meretricious



Ninon de L'Enclos.

arts of the courtesan she allied gifts and graces of mind to which the greatest intellects in France paid homage ; and to her last day she made a mockery of all that woman should hold most sacred, as when she laughingly declared to Fontenelle, " You know what I have done with my body. Well, I could have sold my soul still more profitably. The Jesuits and Jansenists both wanted it."

Ninon de Lenclos made her entry on the stage of life—for life was ever a puppet-show to her—one November day in the year 1620. She was the daughter of strangely contrasted parents. Her father was a devotee of pleasure, a man whose amours and excesses generally were a scandal to all who knew him, and whose only redeeming quality appears to have been his skill on the lute, which, with his vices, he transmitted to his daughter. Her mother was, by way of contrast, a woman of austere piety, who spent her days in masses and prayers, and in the company of devotional books, while her husband was revelling with his boon companions of both sexes.

Both parents were equally devoted to Ninon ; each sought to lead her by widely divergent roads ; and it was the father who succeeded, for his hot, lawless passions ran in her blood. As a child Ninon, who, with the promise of a rare beauty, developed a strong will of her own, shocked all by her wild pranks, and her contempt for the religion her

mother vainly tried to instil into her. She would fling away the good books Madame de Lenclos offered her for reading, and would rush out of the room, dancing and singing some low song from the cabarets which her father had taught her. She refused point-blank to accompany her mother to church ; and loved to horrify her by some such cynicism as this, " Those who need the help of religion are much to be pitied, for they must either have no brains or a very corrupt heart."

So rapid was her development that, long before she entered her teens, her gifts and her character were as formed as those of girls twice her age. At ten she was saturated with the heresies and lax morality of Montaigne ; she played the lute and danced the saraband with the witchery of a consummate artist ; she dazzled all by her wit and epigrams, while shocking them by her disregard for decency ; and while she revelled in the society of men, she showed that contempt for her own sex which she carried through her long life.

Of a child so precocious it is little surprise to learn that she had a lover at fifteen—one Saint-Etienne, a handsome and rakish army captain, who paid assiduous court to the fascinating schoolgirl. But, as with most of her later lovers, the captain's tenure was brought to an early conclusion, when Cardinal Richelieu, then at the zenith of his power as Louis XIII.'s right hand, set covetous eyes on her, and

offered to make her his mistress. Between the poor cavalry officer and the all-powerful Cardinal there could be no question of choice ; and Ninon was quick to transfer her affection to the man who, though older than her own father, was the greatest in all Europe.

A few years earlier her rascally father had crowned his career of infamy by murder, and was a fugitive from justice, with a heavy price on his head ; and no doubt Ninon was glad to escape from the prayers and sighs of her mother to the luxury that surrounded Richelieu's favourites. But even Richelieu could not long hold such a butterfly of pleasure ; and when, in 1641, Lenclos *père* came back to France to die, he found his daughter surrounded by a small army of lovers, whom she cynically grouped in three classes—the payers, the martyrs and the favourites.

Monsieur de Lenclos confessed himself delighted at such fruit of his training, and with his dying breath gave his daughter the characteristic counsel, “ Be scrupulous only in the *choice* of your pleasures ; never mind about the number ”—advice which Ninon scarcely required, for no woman was less disposed to quarrel with the number of her admirers, or more careful in making their selection minister to her pleasure.

Thus, at twenty, we find this extraordinary woman fully launched on her career of conquest,

as shameless as it was splendid. The last frail barrier between her and the fullest licence she coveted was her pious mother ; and when Madame de Lenclos followed her husband to the grave three years later, Ninon was her own absolute mistress, free to fashion her life as she would. Her fortune was small, it is true ; but it was sufficient to supply her with all reasonable luxury, and, above all, it made her independent. She could pick and choose among her legion of lovers, without any care for the gold her favours could demand.

Was Ninon de Lenclos really beautiful ? This was a question as much disputed in her own day as in ours. Tallemant, who knew her well, declares point-blank “ she never was a beauty ” ; and his verdict is endorsed by other chroniclers of her age. And yet her pictures show us a face singularly attractive—of perfect oval, illuminated by large, brilliant eyes in which lurks a strange magnetism, with delicately arched eyebrows, an exquisitely modelled nose, and a sweet rosebud mouth. She had, we are told, a skin of dazzling fairness, a figure faultless in its curved symmetry, and with grace in all its movements.

But one is conscious that no mere catalogue of physical charms can explain the spell Ninon de Lenclos cast over men. Beyond and apart from them all, there was that elusive feminine witchery which is more powerful than any beauty of face or

figure, and which is as impossible to define as to resist. And to this were allied a voice of caressing sweetness, a sparkling wit and a brilliant conversational gift which could range over all subjects, from theology to the theatre, and which held the cleverest men in thrall.

But though no woman of her time loved talking more, or could talk better, Ninon found her chief pleasure in the conquest of man. All she asked was freedom to choose her lovers, and to dismiss them at her sweet and capricious will. "Love is a passion, not a virtue," she once declared; "and a passion does not turn into a virtue because it happens to last—it merely becomes a longer passion." Ninon never allowed love to assume for her an aspect of ennui. "I think I may love you for three months," she said to the Marquis de Sévigné, "and that is an eternity for me!" And thus it is that her lovers pass before us in such bewildering succession. Now it is Richelieu to whom she plays the rôle of the last of his mistresses; and now she flies from the Church to the arms of Mars, when the great Condé comes as suppliant to her feet. But Condé, great soldier that he was, was but a poor lover, and she reproaches him for his cold and clumsy wooing by assuring him that "it requires far more genius to make love than command armies."

That the Duc de Noailles, who succeeded the

“god of war,” proved equally unsatisfactory the following story proves. One day Ninon, bored with her own company, invited him to supper à deux, and when the feast was over conducted him to a guest-chamber. No sooner, however, was the Duc’s head on the pillow than he instantly forgot all about his charming hostess in a deep slumber, from which he never awoke until late the following morning, when his door was flung noiselessly open and his still sleepy eyes fell on a gaily dressed cavalier. “Ah, sir,” he exclaimed, as he sat hurriedly up in bed, “I am a man of honour ; I will give you satisfaction.” And it was only when Ninon’s mocking laughter rippled out that he recognised in the intruder the lady whose vanity he had so outraged. Needless to say, that was the last time the laggard Duc was Madame’s guest.

Thus the lovers followed each other—the handsome and careless d’Andelot, who, of them all, had the audacity to leave her before she gave him his *congé*, thus making a deadly enemy of her ; Miossens, whose involved speech and ponderous attempts at love-making so puzzled her that she declared life was too short to understand him ; Fourreau and Moreau, among the wealthy and dull gallants whom she called “payers” ; and the Marquis des Yvetaux, gayest and most incorrigible of roués, who, it is said, died to the music of a saraband, with

a ribbon she had worn in her hair clasped to his heart.

There was, it is true, one gallant, the Marquis de Villarceaux, who, to the amazement of the world and her own, retained her favour for three years. "Such constancy," she wrote, "really alarms me. Is it possible that some day I shall settle down to the dull decorum of wedded life? Never! I am wedded to liberty; and no other's bride will I ever be!" She even left her beloved Paris to spend idyllic months in the country with Villarceaux; and when at last, thinking it was time to bring this chapter to a close, she left him and returned to the capital, he followed quickly, and installed himself in a house opposite hers, from which he kept a jealous watch on her movements. Once, it is said, seeing her rooms alight long after midnight, he concluded that she had already replaced him, and he was so distracted by the thought that, before rushing across the road to satisfy himself, he jammed on his head, in place of a hat, a silver ewer, from which he had the utmost difficulty in extricating himself. So touched was Ninon by this ludicrous evidence of devotion that she took him into favour again—for a week.

Thus the gay, careless years passed for Ninon de Lenclos, years of unbridled pursuit of pleasure, in which she changed her lovers as lightly as her gowns, and, while revelling in the conquest of men,

enjoyed at least as much the discomfiture of her rivals. Of her own sex, this epitome of all its charm and frailties never concealed her contempt. "A woman's resistance," she would proclaim to her masculine court, "is no proof of her virtue ; it is rather an evidence of her experience. If we were to speak truly we should have to confess that our first impulse is to yield—it is only on reflection that we resist." "I tell you, and I speak for all women, that there are times when they would rather be treated rudely than with too much respect. Men lose more conquests by their own awkwardness than by any virtue in the woman." Such are two of the many indictments of her sex pronounced by this woman, who at least illustrated them in her own person, however false they are when directed at her sex generally.

When Ninon had passed her fiftieth birthday she seems to have been at the zenith of her career of pleasure ; and it is of this period, when her own sons had long entered the arena of love, that the following story is told. Among the many gallants who flocked to her *salon* was the Chevalier de Villars, a handsome young man, who was quick to succumb to the fascination of his middle-aged hostess. He made passionate love to her, vowed that he could not live without her affection ; and the more coldly she received his advances the more desperate became his pleading.

Ninon was in despair. Never was woman placed in so cruel a position. In her distress she sent for the Chevalier de Jarsay, and asked him, with tears streaming down her cheeks, "Must I tell him who he is?" The Chevalier saw no other escape from the dilemma. A few hours later, when her youthful lover was again at her feet beseeching her to take pity on him, she placed her hand on his head and gasped out, "Hush! oh, hush! *I am your mother.*" The Chevalier rose from his knees, fixed his eyes on her with a look of unutterable horror and pain, and then rushed from the room. A minute later a shot rang out. Ninon's boy-lover was dead.

To her charming little house in the rue des Tournelles, with its boudoir decorated with cupids; its *salon* with its gorgeous painted ceiling, on which the Sun King masqueraded as Apollo, and its rose-bowered garden, the fashionable world of Paris flocked to pay homage to this Queen of Enchantments, to listen entranced to her lute-playing, and to be dazzled by the sparkle of her wit. Queen Christina, Sweden's vagrant and erratic Queen, was among her most ardent admirers, and declared there was no lady in France to be compared with her; and Madame de Sévigné was proud to attend her Court, although Ninon counted both her husband and her son among her lovers. She inspired Molière and Boileau to their greatest

efforts ; pitted her wit against Rochefoucauld and eclipsed his cleverest epigrams ; while Saint Evrémond, who was her close friend and champion to his last day, was her very slave.

It was Saint Evrémond who wrote to her, when she had passed her sixtieth birthday, " You were born to be loved all your life. You have been loved by the best men in the world, and you have loved them just long enough to leave nothing in the way of passion untasted, and so wisely as to avoid any of the lassitudes of a waning love." And it was to Evrémond that she exhibited all that was best in her character—her capacity for true friendship, the noblest thoughts and aspirations, the essential goodness of her heart.

Even when old age had robbed her of all vestige of beauty she lost none of her desire and little of her power to charm. " Cupid," to quote the Abbé Chaulieu, " had retreated into the little wrinkles round her eyes " ; but he was there, and as disposed to mischief as when, more than sixty years earlier, he first sped her arrows of conquest. On the verge of eighty Ninon was still practising her arts of coquetry, and receiving the homage of admirers young enough to be her grandsons. One of them, it is said, she kept waiting for her smile of approval until a certain day, " because it was her eightieth birthday, and she wanted to boast of having a new lover on it."

Thus she coquetted with love almost to the very brink of the grave ; and it was only when Death's hand was beckoning to her that she said, a little wearily, " I am tired—tired of always doing the same thing." But even death had no terrors for the old woman of the ever-young and brave heart, who could say, with a smile on her face and with her last breath, " How sweet it will be to talk with all my old friends—there ! "

CHAPTER XXVII

A QUEEN OF SPAIN

FEW queens have made their entry into the world under circumstances so dramatic as the second Isabella of Spain. Outside the royal palace was gathered a dense crowd, all eyes watching for the hoisting of the flag, all ears alert for the boom of the cannon that would announce the birth of an heir to the throne. In the Queen's ante-chamber, "high-ceilinged, wall-painted, wax-floored," were all the great officers of State and of the household, and the ambassadors of foreign powers ; while to and fro among them paced the King, Fernando VII., with pale face and thin, quivering lips, in a fever of ill-suppressed anxiety, for on the next few minutes mighty issues hung for his country.

Would the coming child be a boy or a girl ?—was the question that filled every mind, inside and outside the palace, with anxiety and even terror ; for, if the latter, beyond a doubt the fire of civil war would soon be raging from one end of Spain to the other, in support of the claims of the King's younger brother, Don Carlos, regardless of the fact that Fernando had abolished the Salic Law and thus made the way clear to the throne for a daughter.

Suddenly and softly the closed door of the Queen's chamber opened, "to show a resplendently dressed and buxom midwife standing on the threshold, a figure that represented Fate ; for on her words would hang the weal or woe of a nation. In an instant the King stepped forward ; then, breathless, his pallor deepening, he paused, unable to speak. In another instant the woman had announced to him the birth of a princess. A low, scarcely expressed but irresistible murmur of triumph rose from his brother's adherents as his Majesty passed into the Queen's room, to return presently bearing on a golden platter the new-born wailing morsel of humanity, which he presented to all assembled."

A few days later Don Carlos was proclaimed King, and for seven terrible years Spain was soaked in blood and devastated by fire, until at last the leaders of the rival armies, weary of slaughter, brought the war to an end by the amiable expedient of throwing dice for victory !

Such was the tragedy that brooded over the cradle of the infant Isabella, and clouded the early years of her life. Nor was this all ; for within three years of her birth her father died ; and her mother, Cristina, now appointed Regent to the child-Queen, chose for second husband a handsome young private of the Guards, one Fernando Munoz, keeping her marriage secret and even stoutly denying it that she might enjoy the power and fat

revenues of her office as virtual ruler of the kingdom.

Over the years that followed, with their swift changes of government and their sordid story of intrigues, bribery, fraud and corruption of every kind, we must pass to the year 1845, when the question of Isabella's marriage became a subject of intense interest to her subjects and of grave concern to the powers of Europe. Although the young Queen had still to see her sixteenth birthday, she was physically a woman. "She was," we are told, "tall for her age, plump and vigorous ; her face round, inclined to stoutness, with an expression of good nature and indolence ; the eyes dark and flashing, the lips full and red." Her voice was sweet ; she could be very dignified on occasions of ceremony ; but her usual manner was hoydenish, impulsive and full of fun, and she loved pleasure almost as much as she hated restraint. Altogether she was wholly unfitted for the incredibly difficult position in which Fate had placed her.

Never was the hand of a queen the object of more scheming or more international jealousy. France and England, Austria and Spain, all produced claimants, each of whom was vigorously opposed by the rival nations ; and Cristina, the Queen Mother, actually brought forward her own brother, Comte Trapani, but neither Austria nor Spain would hear of him. Isabella herself favoured her cousin, Don



Isabel II. Queen of Spain.

Enrique, second son of the late King's youngest brother ; but her mother refused even to consider him as son-in-law.

It was Cristina who finally resolved this tangle of rival ambitions and jealousies by proclaiming the engagement of Isabel to Don Enrique's elder brother, Don Francisco de Assisi, in defiance of the powers of Europe and of the fact that, of all her would-be suitors, Isabella disliked him the most. Nor is the reason for her dislike, her contempt even, far to seek ; for Don Francisco was the last man in Spain to inspire love or respect in any girl.

Small and slight in person, his features were insignificant, his voice a high falsetto, his manners inane, though amiable, and his character lackadaisical and colourless. His chief object in life was the decoration of his insignificant person, which he loved to load with tawdry jewellery ; his chief hobby was the writing of sentimental verses. " When he appeared at Court," Mr Molloy says, " his simpering ways—heels together, hands folded, head held on one side—were a butt for the ridicule of the bouncing, free-spoken Isabel, an object of laughter to the maids of honour. Her Majesty's imitation of his mincing walk brought her circle to the borders of hysteria."

Such was the gilded manikin who, one October day in 1846, stood at the altar with his Queen-bride

in the Salon des Columnas of the royal palace of Madrid, gorgeous with its canopied throne in crimson and gold, its enormous chandeliers of rock-crystal, its frescoed walls, immense mirrors, marble busts and golden candelabra—illuminated by a thousand candles, which brought into conspicuousness the scarlet and gold of Court costumes and military uniforms, the brilliance of jewelled orders and superb coronets, the grandees of Spain, the ladies and great officers of the palace, the ministers and presidents of the legislative bodies, the diplomatic corps, deputies and senators.

Two days previously the bridegroom had been made a Field-Marshal-General of Spain ; and into the gorgeous uniform of this rank, with padded chest and shoulders and bullioned embroidery, his puny body had been packed, while round his neck hung the insignia of the Golden Fleece and the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. When at last the fateful words had been spoken and Isabella, pale-faced and mutinous, had promised to “love, honour and obey” the feeble caricature of a man beside her, he rushed from the altar and flung himself sobbing into his father’s arms.

For such a bride, high-spirited and rebellious, with her mother’s hot passions in her veins, united to a man whom she despised from the bottom of her heart, there could be small prospect of wedded happiness or of fidelity. And before her honey-

moon had well waned, there was much secret whispering and smiling at Court over the Queen's partiality for another Don Francisco, not her husband—none other than Don Francisco y Dominguez, the handsomest man, and also the most accomplished roué in Spain. Before she became a wife, Isabella had shown marked favour to her "beloved general"; now that she was allied, against her will, to a hateful husband, she flung away all restraint, all decency, and conducted her amour openly in the face of her Court.

So flagrant, in fact, was her conduct that the Queen-Mother, finding remonstrance useless, quitted Madrid, to show her displeasure, taking with her her Guardsman-husband, now made Duc de Rianzares, and the children she had borne to him. Isabella's consort, too weak to interfere, too humiliated to endure, retired to his shooting-box, El Pardo, leaving his Queen free to set an example of licence which her Court was quick to follow.

But there was still the nation to reckon with; and when General Narvaez was recalled from his exile to take the helm of state his first act was to request the Queen to banish her lover, unless she was prepared to sacrifice her crown. To this request, thus enforced, Isabella at last consented; and Don Francisco was packed off, not unwillingly, to an estate in Estremadura, the Queen's parting

present to him, and to new and important duties as Captain-General of Granada.

To Isabel the loss of a lover more or less mattered little ; for she soon wearied of them all in turn, and there was never any lack of successors. “ I said,” Lord Canning wrote in 1847, “ there was no apparent successor to Don Francisco y Dominguez ; but we shall not have long to wait. The day before yesterday a singer at the opera came home to his lodgings at six o’clock in the morning and found them occupied by the police, who had a carriage ready to take him off to Valencia, the reason being that his night had been passed at the palace. To say the truth, this appears to me rather hard ; for nothing is deducible from the hour at which he left the palace, inasmuch as the Queen turns night into day, sees the ministers after the opera, and does not go to bed until morning.”

It was an easier matter to carry off a too amorous opera singer than to deal with Isabel’s more highly placed lovers, of whom Colonel Gandara was soon installed in chief favour. In fact the Court became such a hotbed of scandal that Narvaez, in despair, summoned the King from his sonnet-writing at El Pardo to take his proper place as consort and thus restore at least the semblance of respectability to his Queen. At the same time Narvaez dismissed as many as possible of her gallants and put a stop to the midnight audiences which she had begun

to give in her bedchamber to privileged ministers and Court officials.

In spite of her moral laxity, however, Isabel did not lack qualities which won some popularity with her subjects ; even her amours they were disposed to condone, so frankly were they carried on and so detested was the husband to whom her mother's headstrong will had tied her. That she had a good heart, if a foolish head, abundant stories prove. Thus when her carriage passed a priest and his acolyte, trudging their slow way to administer the last Sacrament to the dying, she never hesitated to give up her place to the bearers of consolation. She would then follow on foot into the most wretched slums, climb narrow stairways to the miserable garrets, and kneel on the bare boards during the ceremonies. On other occasions she was often seen kneeling for hours in the gloom of one or other of the churches, bewailing her sins with bitter sobs, confessing them and undertaking penances for them.

A few days later, so weak was the flesh, she was plunging more recklessly than ever into the whirl of gaieties and indiscretions, changing her lovers with bewildering rapidity, coquetting now with dukes and high officials, now with actors and private soldiers, until her conduct at last filled ministers and people alike with disgust. So strong was the popular resentment at such unqueenly

doings that when, in January 1854, Isabel gave birth at last to a son (her third child) the event passed almost without notice or comment. The Press treated it with contemptuous indifference. "The bulletins of the physicians," we read, "are put in, not at the head of the newspaper, but amongst the indifferent news, without remark or comment."

A few months later the long-pent-up mutiny against such a disgraceful state of things burst all barriers. One June day in 1854 the whole population of Madrid rose as one man, rushing through the streets with cries of "Death to the Queen! Death to Cristina! Death to the Favourites! Long live Liberty!" High pyres were built and set aflame before the Government offices and the ministers' houses. The royal palace was stormed by infuriated mobs, the very women flinging themselves on the bayonets of the guards. Pictures, statues and furniture, gold and silver plate were thrown out of the windows; and when the palace was a complete wreck it was set on fire.

For days and nights terror and confusion reigned through the city. Every street had its barricades, every square was a battlefield; Madrid was in flames at every point of the compass. "The heat, dust and uproar in these sultry summer days, the crowds of furious men and still more furious women, their faces blackened with smoke and distorted

by passion ; the smell of blood, the sight of bodies torn by shot or stark in death, made the city seem like an inferno."

When Isabel, who was enjoying herself at her La Granja palace, heard of the revolution, she returned post-haste to Madrid, to find herself greeted by scowling faces and cries of "Death!" and "Liberty!"; to see the finest buildings of her capital reduced to blackened shells, its streets strewn with the dead and dying ; and everywhere armed mobs drunk with blood and victory. It was not, however, against her, but against her corrupt Prime Minister, San Luis, and her mother, Cristina, that the anger of the populace was fiercest. San Luis had escaped their fury, and, disguised as a valet, with shaven face and dyed hair, was already well on his way across the Pyrenees ; but Cristina still remained, and every moment her life was in danger.

Isabel's first act was to summon to her aid Espartero, the one strong man among her subjects who could restore order, and who was now living in retirement in the province of Aragon ; and a few days later General Salazar, a sturdy, plain-spoken soldier, appeared with a letter from Espartero saying that he could only return to Madrid on condition that the Queen should dismiss her entire household. When Isabel indignantly refused to agree to the condition, the general took the liberty

to give her a lecture on the immoralities of her Court, "which were the shame of the nation." "I do not know what you mean," she retorted haughtily. "How dare you speak to me in this way? No one has ever so dared before." "That I can quite believe, Madam," was the blunt answer; "for it is not often that truths are spoken in a palace."

In vain Isabel wept and stormed and threatened. She declared that she would abdicate and leave Madrid in the morning rather than do what Espartero demanded. The general was adamant; and when at last he left, he took with him a letter for Espartero agreeing to his terms. A new Cabinet was formed; the household, from the Mistress of the Robes to the meanest scullion, was dismissed; and, a few days later, Cristina, haughty and defiant to the last, was smuggled out of Madrid to safety in Portugal, where she was joined by her soldier-husband, now a grandee of Spain.

Thus peace was restored; but for Isabel there was no peace. "The cause from her birth to the last day of her reign of civil war, revolutions, bloodshed, cruelty and incalculable misery to her people, it is no wonder that their loyalty turned to hate, their pity to scorn. Finally they flung her from the throne, in 1868, after a reign of twenty-five years of wretchedness and degradation to the nation."

With peace re-established, she lost no time in resuming her life of pleasure, and was soon flaunting another disgraceful amour in the face of her subjects. This time her favourite was Carlos Marfori, son of an Italian cook, who from strolling player had risen to be Governor of Madrid and Chief of the Royal Household, in which characters the Queen had abundant opportunities of losing her middle-aged heart to him. She loaded him with honours and riches, made a Marquis of him, and gave him the place of honour by her side at State ceremonies, and whenever she drove through the streets of her capital, until, "swollen with insolent pride, he strutted about the royal apartments with the dignified bearing of one accustomed to palaces of painted canvas, his manner marked by the sweeping command of monarchs crowned with pasteboard."

The end of Isabel's inglorious reign came at last with dramatic suddenness. In April 1868 the province of Catalonia rose in insurrection; and the rebellion spread quickly over the whole face of Spain. Isabel was summoned to Madrid from San Sebastian, where she was spending a few weeks with her husband and her lover, but was warned that she must not bring Marfori with her, a condition which she flatly refused to obey. "I remain at San Sebastian," she telegraphed to her Prime Minister, General Concha, "and shall continue to remain until these brigands are conquered. Should

they succeed, I shall withdraw to France, delighted at having rid myself of a nation of thieves and assassins."

She remained thus defiant until news came to her that the last troops who remained loyal had been defeated ; and then she realised that it was too late to return, that she had lost the throne, and that her only safety lay in flight. Early in the morning of 30th September 1868, the special train that was to take her to exile was awaiting her. "The spectacle she presented," Mr Molloy says, "was too pitiable for comedy. With her round, heavy face swollen from sleeplessness and tears, surmounted by a little straw hat with a nodding red feather, with her dress in disorder, her hands without gloves, her skirts distended by a swinging crinoline, she reached the station."

By her side walked the King-consort, a pathetic picture of melancholy and resignation ; and behind strutted Marfori, the lover, with the swaggering air of a hero of melodrama. No sooner had they and the suite taken their places than the train "fled with a shriek from the station," on its race to France, and the unknown future which for Isabel was to close, thirty-six years later, with death at the Palais de Castile, in Paris.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PRODIGAL DUKE

THERE were few thorns in the rose-bed of Louis de Bourbon, known to fame as the "great Condé," the most brilliant soldier of his day, and the saviour of his country ; but the most troublesome of them was, without doubt, his disappointment in his only son, the Duc d'Enghien.

As a child Monsieur le Duc gave every promise of being a son worthy even of his distinguished father, for he was dowered with rare gifts and graces ; but as he grew to manhood there was no gift which he did not turn to base uses, no grace which he did not prostitute to his love of pleasure.

Saint-Simon describes him as a little man, very thin and slenderly made, whose countenance, though somewhat mean, was still imposing from the fire and intelligence of his eyes. Few men in France had so keen and varied an intelligence, so many accomplishments, so much tact, grace and charm. But no man had ever before so many useless talents, so much futile genius, or so lively and active an imagination solely employed to be his own curse and the scourge of others. He was a prey to jealousy and suspicion ; he was choleric and headstrong ;

now haughty and autocratic, now abjectly servile, even to lackeys, never scrupling to use the lowest means to gain his own ends. "Unnatural son, cruel father, terrible husband, detestable master, pernicious neighbour," such is Saint-Simon's scathing description of this heir to the great Condé; and yet with all this he had such a power of charm that few could resist him when he chose to exercise it.

To his wife, Anne of Bavaria, "ugly, virtuous and stupid, a little deformed, and not very clean in her person," the Duc was a veritable tyrant, who found an almost fiendish pleasure in torturing and humiliating her. Slavishly devoted to him, ministering to his comfort, and submitting to him in all things, her reward was hourly insults, even blows and kicks. For her to propose anything, however trivial, was for him to oppose it.

He would order her to start on a journey; and no sooner was she seated in her carriage than he would drag her out of it, and order her to delay her journey until the next day and the next, when he would repeat the performance. "At other times he would summon her from church, and make her leave High Mass; and sometimes would even send for her when she was on the point of receiving the Communion, and she would be obliged to return on the instant, and defer her Communion until another occasion." "This he did," we are told, "not

because he wanted her, but merely to gratify his whim."

Of the Duc's eccentricities even in his earlier years many stories are told. So uncertain, for example, were his movements that every day he had four dinners prepared for him at widely separated points of the compass—at Paris, Ecouen, Chantilly, and wherever the Court might chance to be; so that, in whatever direction he chose to travel, he might be assured of a meal. And his dinner, which he almost invariably ate in solitude, was always the same—a modest meal of soup and half-a-chicken, the other half being carefully kept for the following day's dinner. He had, too, a perfect passion for practical jokes, of which the following is a sample.

The Duc de Luxembourg, a simple-minded noble, had for wife a young and charming woman whose smiles and favours were, it is said, for any man rather than her husband. When he and his lady were once invited to take part in a masquerade at Court, Monsieur le Duc very politely offered to provide Monsieur de Luxembourg with a costume which, he assured him, would eclipse all others in its striking originality. "Thereupon"—to quote Mr N. Williams—"the malicious Prince proceeded to array his unconscious victim in various fantastic garments, which he crowned with a gigantic pair of antlers, which almost touched the candelabra.

“ Thus attired, he was conducted into the ball-room, where, by a sudden lifting of the mask, his identity was revealed. When the company perceived who it was who was thus parading the emblem of a deceived husband a great shout of laughter rang through the room, which redoubled when the luckless Luxembourg, mistaking the hilarity which his appearance aroused for a tribute to the originality of his costume, bowed repeatedly.”

When the Prince was not engaged in tormenting his long-suffering wife, in practical jokes, often heartless, or in long, mysterious journeys, he was still more agreeably employed in playing the rôle of Don Juan, in which, in spite of “ a shape which resembled a gnome rather than a man,” and a face almost repulsive in its ugliness, he was as successful as the handsomest Lothario at Louis’ court. What he lacked in physical advantages he gained in a supple tongue, his courtly arts and graces, and a strange personal magnetism against which the most beautiful and coy of women seemed powerless. “ Now,” says Saint-Simon, “ he disguised himself as a lackey ; another time as a female vendor of articles for the toilet ; anon, in some other fashion. He was the most ingenious man in the world.”

Among the many great ladies who smiled on the “ ugly Prince’s ” wooing there was none more fair than the Duchesse de Nevers, niece of Louis XIV.’s famous mistress, Madame de Montespan. There

was, in fact, no more beautiful woman in France than the supremely fascinating Gabrielle de Thiangès, who had been led from the schoolroom to the altar by Mazarin's nephew, and who retained her charms undimmed to the last day of her sixty years of life. Louis himself had succumbed at sight of her radiant loveliness ; and, but for Mazarin's intervention, she might have shared his throne.

Such was the woman who, when the dwarfish and ill-favoured Duc d'Enghien came a-wooing her, had no power to resist him. She was as hopelessly infatuated with him as he with her ; and the lovers conducted their liaison with such skill and secrecy that many months passed before the suspicion of the lady's husband was aroused. Indeed, so cleverly were the meetings arranged that a much more wide-awake husband than the Duc de Nevers might well have been deceived. According to Madame Caylus, the Prince (the Duc d'Enghien was of the blood royal, cousin to the King), in order to gain access to his lady, purchased two houses, one on each side of the Nevers hotel. Saint-Simon declares that " he rented all the houses on the same side of the street, furnished them, and pierced the connecting walls." Whatever the truth may be, there is no doubt that by some such means of secret access the lovers were able to meet daily without any but themselves being any the wiser.

But such clandestine love-making was not always

to remain undiscovered. The husband's suspicion was at last aroused that Madame was not as discreet in her conduct as a wife ought to be, and he decided to carry her off to Rome. There was little that was alarming to the Duchesse in such an announcement, for the Duc was in the habit of starting on such lengthy journeys at a moment's notice. He would, Madame de Caylus tells us, "set off for Rome in the same way as anyone else would go out to supper; and Madame de Nevers had been known to enter her carriage in the persuasion that she was merely going for a drive, and then to hear her husband say to the coachman, 'To Rome.'"

This time, however, suspecting the Duc's motive, she warned her lover and begged him to devise some means to avert the separation, a suggestion which was in every way after the Prince's heart. To his fertile brain the problem presented little difficulty, and he discovered the key to it in the Duc de Nevers' passion for verse-making, of which he was very vain. To Monsieur de Nevers he accordingly went with the news that he was organising a grand fête in honour of the Dauphin, and begged him as a great favour to write the words of the *divertissement*, which he declared no other poet could do so gracefully and well. This was a bait which de Nevers could not resist. He undertook the duty so flatteringly proffered; the journey to Rome was postponed indefinitely; and the Prince and his lady

were left to continue their love-making undisturbed. That the fête which had purchased this privilege cost one hundred thousand crowns was a mere bagatelle to a prince who was prepared to squander millions in his pursuit of pleasure.

Indeed, he is said to have lavished millions on one alone of his many mistresses, the Marquise de Richelieu, the beautiful daughter of the Duc de Mazarin and Hortense Mancini, the Cardinal's loveliest and favourite niece. According to Saint-Simon, the Prince fell madly in love with this siren and spent millions upon her, and to keep himself informed of her movements. But the stream of his wooing did not long flow smoothly. One day he discovered, to his great indignation and dismay, that he had a dangerous rival in the Comte de Roucy, one of the handsomest Lotharios in France. When he reproached the Marquise with her treachery she assured him with tears that he cruelly misjudged her ; and when the reports of his spies established the truth of the charge beyond all denial she swore that de Roucy was nothing to her ; that her heart was entirely the Prince's, and that she would never see his rival again.

To all her pleadings and vows the Prince turned a deaf ear. She must go to her lover, he declared ; as for himself, he would never see her again. Then, in her extremity, the Marchioness conceived a diabolical plan to end the matter. She proposed

to invite de Roucy to her house, that some of the Prince's people should lie in wait, and when the Count appeared should make away with him. Thus callously she proposed that one lover should be murdered in order to appease the jealousy of the other. But Monsieur le Duc, unscrupulous as he was in his wooing, drew the line at assassination. He was, in fact, so horrified at the suggestion that he himself warned de Roucy of the design on his life ; and from that day never saw Madame de Richelieu again.

Proud as the Duc d'Enghien was of his many conquests in love, his greatest triumph was his conquest of the widowed Comtesse de Maran, a lady of great beauty who, according to Madame de Sévigné, had been heard to declare that she would rather die than surrender herself to a man whom she loved ; but if a man loved her, and she did not find him altogether odious, she would be willing to yield. That when the Duc d'Enghien came to swell the legion of her wooers she did not find him too odious we know from the fact that she became the mother of his daughter, a girl who grew to a beauty and a frailness as great as hers. When she found a husband in a wealthy widower, the Marquis de Lassay, she proved herself a worthy daughter of her parents by providing herself with a lover before the first week of her honeymoon had passed.

Of the nine children which Anne of Bavaria bore to her pleasure-loving husband, one son only reached manhood—Louis, Duc de Bourbon, who was, in all ways, a true son of his father, dwarfish, preternaturally ugly, “with an abnormally large head, an unwholesome complexion, and a surly expression.” But, ill-favoured as he was, he found a bride while still a boy in Mademoiselle de Nantes, the twelve-year-old daughter of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan.

To his unattractive exterior the Duc de Bourbon allied his father’s violent temper and his passion for practical jokes, of which some remarkable stories are told. On one occasion, when one of his guests, the Comte de Fiesque, was getting the better of him in an argument, the Duc sprang to his feet in a violent rage. Seizing a plate he hurled it at the Count’s head, and crowned this outrage by the indignity of ordering his servants to turn him out of the house at midnight. On another occasion, when he discovered that his friend the Marquis de Termes had reported one of his escapades to the King, he sent several of his servants to waylay the informer, armed with stout canes, to administer a thrashing so merciless that the unhappy marquis was confined to his bed for some weeks. Of his practical jokes one at least had a fatal sequel, when he offered a glass of champagne to the poet Santeuil, into which he had emptied his snuff-box.

Of the Duc de Bourbon's many mistresses—for in his gallantry, as in all other respects, he was his father's son—the most noted was the beautiful Madame de Mussy, "a little woman, exquisitely shaped, with a dazzling complexion and ravishing arms and neck," who was wedded to a staid and elderly Dijon lawyer. So unsuspecting was the councillor that the amorous Duc had made a complete conquest of his lady before he awoke to the discovery that he had a rival. When his jealousy found expression in violence, Madame was only too glad of the excuse to leave his roof ; and she soon found herself installed in a sumptuous house in Paris as the avowed mistress of the Duc de Bourbon, and surrounded by a court little less brilliant than that of her lover's cousin, King Louis himself.

Had Madame but been prudent she might have enjoyed her life of luxury and pleasure for many years, for the Duc was her veriest slave ; but, unfortunately, she fell under the spell of the Comte d'Albert, the most notorious "lady killer" in France, with whom she became hopelessly infatuated. "Monsieur le Duc, finding that she no longer responded to his caresses with her accustomed ardour, had her watched, and ere long discovered the truth. His wrath was terrible, though happily he contented himself by venting it on the furniture, mirrors and porcelain of his perfidious mistress, among which he raged with such fury that

in a few moments the apartment was strewn with the wreckage of what had represented a considerable fortune."

Such was the son of Henri Jules, Duc d'Enghien, and grandson of the great Condé—like his father a degenerate, sacrificing to a life of pleasure and self-indulgence gifts which, if allowed proper exercise, might have made his name famous in history.

As for the Duc d'Enghien, when even pleasure began to pall he retired to Chantilly, the country home which his father's taste and wealth had converted into a veritable fairyland. Here he devoted himself and his vast fortune to making Chantilly still more beautiful, the wonder-place of Europe; adding to its treasures of pictures, statuary and objects of art, and making its gardens dreams of beauty.

With the years his eccentricity became more and more marked—so marked that it was scarcely distinguishable from madness. Saint-Simon tells us that there were times when he imagined that he was a dog. "People very worthy of belief had told him that they had seen the Prince on the rare occasions when he left Chantilly to attend the King at his *lever* and *coucher*, suddenly throw his head into the air several times running, and open his mouth wide, like a dog when barking, yet without making a noise."

Once, too, he chanced to call on the Maréchale de Noailles at the moment when her bed was being made and there remained only the counterpane to put on. For a moment he paused at the door, and then took a flying leap on to the bed, calling out in a transport of delight, " Oh ! le beault, le beault ! qu'il est appetisant ! " To the Maréchale, who looked shocked at such astounding behaviour, he explained, " Pardon, madam ! The bed looked so beautiful and so clean that I could not resist the temptation to roll on it."

During the last year of his life he became so careful of his diet that he had all his food scrupulously weighed before he would touch it ; and when his last illness seized him he refused point-blank to eat at all, declaring that he was dead, and that " dead men need no nourishment." In vain the doctors remonstrated and argued. He was obdurate ; until at last they hit on a happy expedient. They decided to humour his delusion. He was dead, of course, they said ; but it was quite a mistake to imagine that for that reason he required no food. In order to convince him, they brought to his room several men who simulated death, and yet were able to enjoy a hearty meal. Such evidence as this was not to be disputed, and the Prince at last consented to join his fellow-corpses in their banquet.

When the end drew near, his wife, still devoted to

him, begged him to see a priest, a request which he angrily refused. No power on earth should make him see a confessor, he declared in answer to the Duchesse's tears and pleadings. He had done very well without one for many years, and he was not going to see one now. The Duchesse little knew that the man who thus scorned the consolations of religion at the very portal of death had for weeks been visited daily by a priest, Père la Tour, whose visits were so secretly arranged that no member of his family even suspected them.

At first he had insisted that the father should come to him in disguise ; and when the priest declined to masquerade as a layman the utmost precautions were taken to shroud his visits in secrecy. He was admitted at dead of night by a back door by a confidential servant, who led him through a labyrinth of passages to the Prince's bedroom. Each door, as it was passed, was carefully locked behind him, and the return journey was conducted with the same precautions and secrecy.

Thus deceitful to the last, died Henri Jules, Duc d'Enghien, one April day in 1709, "regretted by none, neither by servants nor friends, neither by child nor wife. Indeed Madame la Princesse," Saint-Simon tells us, "was so ashamed of her tears that she made excuses for them." Less than a year later his prodigal son, the Duc de Bourbon, was seized with a fit as he was driving over the Pont

Royal, and died within a few hours at the Hôtel de Condé, leaving behind him as few regrets as his father ; and, like him, the memory of great gifts shamelessly prostituted to a passion for pleasure !

CHAPTER XXIX

THE "PLAYTHINGS" OF A KING

WHEN François I. succeeded his uncle, the twelfth Louis, on the throne of France, at the age of twenty, he was as goodly a young man to look upon as any who ever wore a crown. Handsome and strong, with muscles well knit by practice in all knightly and manly exercises, he had already won fame for a courage in courting dangers from which most brave men would shrink.

He had especially distinguished himself as a daring huntsman. There was no boar or wolf too savage for him to attack single-handed with his sword, and many tales were told of his prowess before he had left his school days behind him. One day, one such story runs, "he had a huge wild boar let loose in the courtyard of the castle of Amboise, where he was living with his mother ; and when the furious animal broke through a doorway, and ran upstairs into the apartments, he attacked single-handed and slew the great tusked beast as it charged him on the staircase."

There was a wild, lawless strain in the blood of this young Duc de Valois, who was destined to be a king ; for when he was not braving death in the

chase he was never happier than when engaged in fierce fights with his hot-blooded companions, or playing ringleader in every kind of horseplay or rough practical joke his ingenuity could devise, to the constant terror of his mother and sister and to the admiration of the wild spirits of the age. And to this fierce, turbulent side of his character was strangely allied the passion for poetry and art which in later years was to make him the father and founder of the French Renaissance.

Such was the young Duc who, as a boy, was wedded to the insipid daughter of Louis XII., and who, shortly after his twentieth birthday, succeeded him on the throne as François I., to the delight of his subjects, who expected great things from a King of such proved courage and character.

No sooner had François mounted his throne than he set to work to provide himself with the finest horses, the best of arms, and for mistress the most attractive and handsome young lady to be found in France ; for these three pursuits—war, the chase and love—were his dominating passions to his last day. Under the watchful eye of his mother he had so far had little opportunity of love-making. The wife who had been provided for him had no beauty or charm to stir his pulses. Now that he was King, his own master and the master of France, he was at last free to love whom he would ; for there was no

lack of fair women among whom he could pick and choose.

Nor was it long before his choice was made. Secluded in an ancient chateau on the Chère, he heard, was a girl of remarkable beauty, a daughter of the semi-royal family of Foix. As a child of twelve, Françoise, daughter of Phèbus de Foix, Vicomte de Lantrec, had been wedded to Jean de Laval, Comte de Chateaubriand, a man older than her own father, and the most jealous husband in France. Here, in the grim, centuries-old fortress, the Comte had for some years kept his lovely girl-wife secluded from the world, never suffering her to leave the castle grounds ; while he, like many another husband of the time, sought his pleasures elsewhere.

Such was the treasure on which the new King set his heart, the more resolute to win her as the difficulties in his path seemed insuperable. To the Comte himself François made his first overtures, asking him why he did not bring his young wife, of whose beauty he had heard so much, to Court. "Sire," answered the Sieur de Laval, "my wife's charms have been much exaggerated. She is beautiful, it is true, but with the beauty and the coldness of a marble statue ; she is positively stupid, with no more brains than a snipe. She could not possibly interest your Majesty ; in fact, she is really not worth discussing."

“None the less,” persisted the King, “we should like to see her and judge for ourselves. Besides, it might brighten her wits to bring her out into the world a little. Won’t you send for her?” “Ah, Sire,” protested Laval, “I assure you it is useless. She adores the country and loathes the town. She would inevitably pine away, and I do not want her to incur this risk to her health.”

Within an hour Laval, his jealousy roused by the King’s words, was spurring towards Nantes as fast as his horse would carry him, to warn the fair Françoise under no circumstances to leave the chateau except on receipt of a secret sign which he gave her, thus securing her, as he thought, against any design of the King to lure her away in his absence. But François was not so easily to be thwarted. It was no difficult matter to learn the sign by bribing a member of the Comte’s household; and one day, when her husband was at Court, a band of gallants arrived at Chateaubriand armed with the “open sesame” to which Françoise was only too glad to respond; and she was carried off to the Court a by no means unwilling captive.

Here the released beauty had the most flattering of receptions—from all save her husband, who, in disgust at being outwitted, left the Court, declaring that he “washed his hands of her”—a step which was as foolish on his part as it was pleasing to

Françoise, delighted with her first taste of liberty under such pleasant conditions. So quick was she in responding to the overtures of the handsome young King that within a week, we are told, she had given herself up to him, body and soul.

It was, indeed, a new and splendid world to which the prisoner of the Chateaubriand found herself transported, for she was treated as Queen not only by François, but by his entire Court. The King's mother took the "pretty child" to her heart; his wife, Queen Claude, far from showing the jealousy she must have felt, gave her the welcome of a friend; and Marguerite d'Angoulême, François's sister, "made all kinds of elegant designs and cunning mottoes, which were carried out in beautiful articles of jewellery, to be given to the brilliant young Countess, who soon enjoyed herself thoroughly at Court, over which she shared the influence of Marguerite."

As for the King, he was infatuated with his new plaything. He lived only for her smiles; he was her shadow everywhere, and he surrounded her with all the luxury money could purchase or art devise. Her apartments were the most sumptuous in the palace. Her bedroom, of his own designing, was a wonder chamber of beauty, with its voluptuous half-lights, its marvels of sculpture and furnishing, and its bed, "surrounded by balustrades of

carved wood, with mirrors, velvet hangings and ebony seats."

Françoise was now Queen of France in all but name, with her place at the King's right hand at banquets and fêtes, in State processions, and even in the council chamber. The greatest ladies at Court remained standing in her presence ; the Court gallants vied with each other in paying homage to her beauty and her power ; and great nobles and ambassadors flocked to her bedside, where she received them with all the dignity and graciousness of a sovereign lady. The most costly dresses and jewels were showered on her by her royal lover, who, to give her pleasure, made generals of three of her brothers.

Nor was François by any means the jealous lover her husband had proved ; for, while himself claiming freedom to carry his love elsewhere, he was content to turn a blind eye to his mistress's dallying with any gallant of the Court who took her fancy—even with that most dangerous of roués, Bonnivet, Admiral of France, of whom Marguerite d'Angoulême tells so many piquant stories in her " Heptameron." It was Bonnivet, hero of a hundred love adventures, who, it may be remembered, one night made an uninvited appearance in the room of Princess Marguerite herself by means of a trap-door in the ceiling—an entry which was followed by a speedy and undignified exit.

When he found himself once more in his own room, we read, "The candle was still burning on the table before his mirror, which showed his face all scratched and bitten, and the blood streaming from it." "Thou are rightly served, pernicious beauty!" the disillusioned Bonnivet exclaimed, as he gazed at his reflected visage. "Thy vain promises set upon an impossible enterprise, and one which, far from increasing my good fortune, will perhaps bring upon me a world of trouble."

For some years Françoise held her supreme place in the King's heart, in spite of her occasional lapses and the furious jealousy of her husband, who, we learn, "often caused her beautiful eyes to be filled with tears by boxing her ears and administering other corporal punishment to his faithless spouse." Such exhibitions of jealousy, indeed, only served to keep François at her feet, for he imagined that what another man desired so much was surely worth keeping for himself. Her queendom, in fact, only came to an end on the King's return from captivity in Spain, in 1526.

It was with a light and gay heart that the Comtesse made the journey, in company with the King's sister and other ladies of the Court, to Mont de Marsan to welcome her lover on his restoration to liberty and his throne, little dreaming of the blow Fate had prepared for her. She knew well that the Duchesse d'Angoulême, François's mother,

had grown to hate her, and that she would love nothing better than to see her supplanted in her son's favour ; but Françoise could afford to smile at such jealousy, since she knew the King's heart was all hers.

Among the group of ladies eagerly awaiting the King's coming was the Duchesse, and by her side a young beauty, " with a dazzling complexion, white as a lily and crimson as the rose," whom she had brought with her in the hope of making her her son's new mistress. This young and lovely rival was the daughter of Guillaume de Pisseleu, a captain of the Legion of Picardy, whom the Duchesse had brought to Court as maid of honour while her son was in his Madrid dungeon. He had already heard from his mother of her beauty and her wit, her love of letters and art, and there were many in the group of ladies who anticipated with relish the coming meeting.

When at last the King appeared, radiant and debonair, Françoise stood trembling in anticipation of the loving greeting which she had no doubt awaited her after he had embraced his mother and sister. As he advanced in her direction she saw to her dismay that he gave her no glance, even of recognition, but went straight to her lovely rival, Anne de Pisseleu, whom he greeted with a sweeping bow and words of gallantry which brought blushes of pleasure to her cheeks. The Duchesse's schem-

ing had proved more successful than even she had dared to hope ; for at first sight of the new beauty her son had succumbed, and the Comtesse's reign was ended. A few days later Anne de Pisseleu was installed as the King's mistress, and the discarded Françoise was sent back to her chateau on the Chère, and to her husband, who had waited so long for her return—and his revenge.

One of the first acts of the new favourite was to claim the jewels of her predecessor, the precious gifts of the King designed by his sister ; and in obedience to her wish François sent a message to demand their return. The Comtesse kept the messenger waiting while she had them all melted down ; then she returned the ingots with the message that, " As every word they had borne was engraved on her heart she could well spare them ; but that no one else should enjoy the love tokens which she had solely valued as coming from him."

Of the fate that befell the Comtesse de Chateaubriand at the hands of her jealous husband conflicting stories are told. According to one story, after being immured for weeks in a black-draped room, she was bled to death by two surgeons, while four men held her down. Another tells us how she was starved to death. All that is certainly known is that she died a victim to the vengeance of her husband, who crowned his cruelty by raising over her grave a splendid monument, with a

mock epitaph praising her many virtues and her chastity!

Before the grave had closed over this ill-fated victim of a King's lust and a husband's vengeance, Anne de Pisseleu was firmly enthroned in her place as *maîtresse en titre* to François, and had blossomed into the Duchesse d'Étampes. As was the custom when a King of France took for favourite an unmarried lady, she was provided with a husband in La Brosse, a man who was glad to purchase so easily pardon for his treason in taking up arms for the Bourbons against his sovereign, and equally glad, the moment the ceremony was over, to leave his bride for ever, while he went off to his restored estates in Brittany.

It was not long before the new Duchesse made it quite clear to François that she meant to have no rivalry near her throne. One by one she rid the Court of all who were not prepared to bow down to her, and at her bidding the King even consented to send his beloved sister, Marguerite (now wife of Henry of Navarre) into exile, unmoved by the tears she shed—"Enough" (to quote her own words) "to melt a flint."

For François now there was only one woman in all the world. He had no thought to spare for the Comtesse, whom his treachery had consigned to a horrible fate in the Chateaubriand; for Ximena, the lovely daughter of the Duke of Infantado, who

had loved him so passionately when he was a prisoner in Spain ; or for the fair Queen Eleanore, whom he had vowed with many kisses to love for ever, and who had danced the fandango so prettily for him at Toledo. He was possessed, body and soul, by the "lovely, gay, witty, intoxicating demoiselle from Picardy, *brillante de nouveauté, de l'espérance*, who from the first, with the fascination of a serpent, drew him into and held him firmly in her seductive coils."

For a score of years, until, in fact, François drew his last breath at Rambouillet, one March day in 1547, the siren from Picardy retained her spell over the King of France, reaping such a harvest as few royal favourites have ever reaped. The Treasury was placed at her disposal, to help herself as she would ; stately chateaux and large estates were hers without the asking ; she decked her beauty with the Crown jewels, which none but a queen had ever worn before. Dignities and rich offices were lavished on a legion of relatives, including her thirty brothers and sisters, and a cardinal's hat was procured for her uncle.

And in return for all this largess she rewarded her lover with infidelity and treachery. She even sold him to his lifelong rival and enemy, Charles V., Emperor of Germany, under his very nose, as the following story proves. One day, when Charles, during a temporary truce, was a guest at the French

Court, while the Duchesse held to him a golden ewer at dinner-time, he dropped into it a magnificent diamond ring. When Anne fished the ring out of the ewer to return it, the Emperor, "assuming his most amiable expression, begged that one so fair as the owner of the bowl would honour him by accepting the jewel." Such an offer, so courteously expressed, proved irresistible. She accepted the ring, and with it the Emperor's friendship; and when Charles next invaded France there was no spy so active or useful on his behalf as the mistress of his enemy. In fact, it was to her he owed the capture of two important strongholds, which enabled him to dictate terms of peace.

Even when the incomparable Diane de Poitiers, the mistress of the boy-dauphin, Henri, brought her ripe beauty and scheming brain to Court, the Duchesse's supremacy remained unshaken. She arrayed against the "interloper" all the most powerful forces of the Court, poisoned the minds of the King and Queen against her, exposed the arts by which she enhanced her middle-aged charms, and openly insulted her by boasting in her hearing that she (the Duchesse) was born on the very day on which Madame la S  n  schale was married.

Thus, the demoiselle of Provence retained her queendom and made a puppet of Fran  ois until he drew his last breath in her arms at Rambouillet. Then came the swift end of all things for her, and

sweet revenge for her rival. When she returned to Paris from the King's deathbed she found her apartments in the palace occupied ; the new King refused even to see her, and all her garnered jewels were taken from her to bedeck Diane de Poitiers, Henri's mistress, who at last had " come to her own." Her lover, Bossut de Longueval, was seized in the middle of the night in the room of a beautiful young Italian lady who was maid of honour to the new Queen (Catherine de Medicis), and was sent to the Bastille. As for Madame d'Étampes, she was glad to escape from the Court, in which she had become an object of hatred and derision, to spend her remaining days in the obscurity of the country.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DISTRACTIONS OF A WARRIOR

“ I NEVER was in love, except, perhaps, with Josephine—a little,” the great Napoleon once confessed. “ And when I first knew her I was twenty-seven years of age. For Marie Louise I had—a sincere affection.” But if Josephine was the only woman who ever really captured Napoleon’s heart, it is certain that before he set eyes on the bewitching Corsican he had had as many love affairs as he had counted years.

He himself, with a refreshing ingenuousness, tells the story of his first love adventure when he was a boy of eighteen. “ I had come out from the Italiens,” he says, “ and was walking rapidly along the alleys of the Palais Royal, when my eyes fell on a woman. The time and place, no less than her general appearance and her extreme youth, left no doubt on my mind as to her calling. She stopped, and I noticed that her bearing was not in the least brazen. Encouraged by her timidity, I spoke to her—I, whose repugnance to her class is such that I feel myself contaminated by a glance from one of its members. But her pale complexion, her frail physique, and her soft voice decided me at once.



The Empress Josephine.

‘ You are very cold,’ I began ; ‘ how can you venture into these alleys ? ’ ‘ Ah, sir, the cold refreshes me. I must finish my evening. . . . ’ ”

Thus the world’s conqueror begins the story of his first essay in love, which he defines as “ the occupation of the idle man, the distraction of the warrior, the rock of the sovereign,” and in the next breath as “ a silly infatuation—depend on it.” To Napoleon it was certainly never more than the distraction of the warrior ; and he was speaking the truth when he declared, “ All the women in the world would not make me lose an hour.”

That he had some strange fascination for women there can be no doubt whatever ; for conquest in love came as easily to him as success in war. But what was the secret of this fascination it is not easy to say. As a young man his appearance was singularly unattractive. No man ever less looked the lover than the puny, pale, shabby little fellow who walked the Paris streets in his days of obscurity and poverty—so poor was he, in fact, that, as he confesses, “ I can only afford one meal in the day, at three o’clock,” and that meal cost him but three-pence a plate. “ His lank hair floated uncombed over his shoulders, his overcoat was threadbare, his whole appearance unkempt,” a lady who knew him at the time wrote to Stendhal. “ He was far and away the thinnest and most curious-looking creature I had ever met—so desperately thin as to give one

the notion that he was the victim of some wasting disease." His hands, according to the Duchesse d'Abrantés, were not merely ungloved, but dirty ; he slouched along the streets with a careless, clownish gait, and his boots were as badly cared for as they were ill-fitting.

And yet this down-at-heels young subaltern, living in a couple of miserable rooms on forty-five pounds a year with his young brother Louis—one destined to be an emperor, the other King of Holland—had as many love affairs as any gallant of the Court who strutted in fine feathers. When he went to Valence, in 1785, a "shy, melancholy youth, much engrossed in study," he found a welcome in most of the great houses of the neighbourhood, and won many smiles from the daughters of his hostesses, to one of whom, Mademoiselle Caroline du Columbier, he as nearly lost his heart as was possible for him. It was quite an idyllic story, which he recalled many years later, in his days of exile and shattered fortunes, in these words : "No one could have been more innocent than we were. We used often to arrange little assignations. I remember one in particular, at daybreak on a midsummer's morning. Will it be believed, our sole delight on that occasion was in nibbling cherries together !"

His next love affair was of a very different nature. It was when, as a newly promoted captain of artillery, he was spending a few weeks' leave in his

native Corsica ; and the story is thus told by Baron Larrey : “ Bonaparte gave his mother a great deal of anxiety in connection with a love affair with a woman who had conceived a violent passion for him, and who was endowed with all the jealousy of her race. Having ascertained that she had been abandoned for another mistress, she resolved on vengeance. Inviting him to dinner, she mixed poison with his wine, and caused him to drink it at a draught. Later in the evening most alarming symptoms supervened, and the young officer’s life was in imminent danger. His mother, who had been immediately told of the matter, hastened to his side, and prepared the remedies which the doctor prescribed.”

Napoleon, however, was reserved for a very different destiny than a jealous mistress had planned for him ; and a little later we find him making violent love to Mademoiselle Victorine Chastenay, the belle of Chatillon-sur-Seine, who was “ astonished, electrified, enchanted ” by the shabby “ long-haired military person, with the devouring eyes.” A few days of idyllic wooing, of secret meetings and blissful rambles, and Bonaparte said good-bye to the weeping Victorine, while he departed in search of fresh adventures. Within a few weeks he was at the feet of Madame Permon, a buxom widow, mother of a large family, and still wearing weeds for her late husband.

When, bending over the widow's plump white hand, he gravely asked her to be his wife, Madame looked at him for a moment in amazement, and then—shook with laughter. When she had at last recovered from her merriment she said, "My dear Napoleon, pray don't think I am laughing at you. I am laughing at myself for the ridiculous rôle you are assigning me. Perhaps you think that you know my age? Well, you don't; and I am not going to tell it to you. What I *will* tell you is that I am old enough to be your mother; and not only yours, but Joseph's to boot. And now let us bring this afflicting joke to an end." In vain Napoleon protested that he was never more serious in his life; that her age mattered less than nothing to him; and that he should know no happiness unless she consented. The widow was inexorable.

But Bonaparte was never the man to allow defeat to quench his courage. Before Madame Permon had ceased to laugh at the absurd position in which his gallantry had placed her, he was absorbed in pursuit of that "mellow siren, Montansier, actress, adventuress, and woman of pleasure" a lady who had counted her lovers by scores before Napoleon was cradled, and who might easily have been his grandmother.

To this ancient charmer Napoleon now began to pay assiduous court; and the climax came at a meeting arranged by Barras, who tells us, with

infinite gusto, " I betrothed the future spouses that very day, and they both agreed with equal willingness. I thought I must have exploded with laughter, but was compelled to keep serious. At table I placed Mademoiselle Montansier beside me, telling Bonaparte to take a seat opposite. Throughout dinner they sat with their eyes fixed on one another." And so on through pages of entertaining description.

But whether Napoleon actually proposed to this ancient Circe, who, Barras declares, " could not have been less than seventy," or whether, as Lady Elliott states, " she rejected his offer," we know not. It remains as evidence of his susceptibility, that a woman who had been visited by such gallants as the Duc de la Trémoille and the Marquis de Jonsac, before he was born, still had the power to set the heart of the coming Emperor a-flutter !

Such are a few of Napoleon's early love adventures, which are now almost unknown to the world, and which justify his boast in later and much different years, " I have conquered hearts as well as countries."

That Napoleon loved his wife Josephine, and that she was possibly the only woman he ever truly loved, may be true enough. But that he could not long be loyal even to her the following little-known episode in his life proves. No sooner had he set foot in Egypt in 1798 than, as Monsieur Masson

tells us, "he seems to have felt an attraction of curiosity towards the women of the East, as had many of his officers. Some half-dozen were brought before him, but their appearance, and notably their obesity, filled him with disgust, and they were hastily dismissed. He was already remarkable for the extraordinary fastidiousness of his senses, and the irritable delicacy of his nervous organisation." But if the houris of the East failed to attract him, there were others who pleased his eyes. Among the many women who, disguised as soldiers, had accompanied his army, the flower of the flock was a little fair-haired lady, with a brilliant complexion and exquisite teeth, who would have been attractive anywhere. In Egypt she was adorable.

Marguerite Pauline Belleisle had been a milliner's apprentice at Carcassone when her employer's nephew, a young lieutenant of the 22nd Chasseurs, succumbed to her beauty and made her his wife. Before the honeymoon had waned, however, the bridegroom received orders to embark for Egypt; and the bride, who was in no mood to be left behind, donned chasseur's uniform (for women were not allowed to join the expedition) and sailed in the same ship with her husband. Under what conditions Napoleon first set eyes on the pretty ex-milliner is doubtful. According to one story he was riding one day with his staff in the neighbourhood of Cairo when "he had to draw rein

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to allow of the passage of a party of travellers mounted upon Arab donkeys. His ready eye picked out among the riders a young woman with a piquant, vivacious expression," with the fresh rose-colouring of a schoolgirl, eyes sparkling with enjoyment, and the gleam of pearly teeth between red, daintily curved lips.

Monsieur Masson, however, tells us that his attention was first drawn to her by an aide-de-camp, as, with head upturned and parted lips, she was watching a balloon rise at a fête held at Esbekieh. In the evening he saw her again in the Tivoli Egyptien, a pleasure garden modelled on the Paris Tivoli, where he approached her, paid her all manner of compliments, and spent half the evening at her side. Further meetings followed, at each of which Madame Foures' resistance became less and less strong. Prompted either by virtue or prudence the little woman held out for some time. Protestations, declarations, letters, costly presents were necessary. At last she succumbed.

The climax arrived with an invitation to dine, in company with other ladies, with Napoleon. To Madame Foures was assigned the place of honour at Napoleon's right hand ; and he did the honours with great gallantry. " All of a sudden he threw over a decanter of iced water, as if by accident, and on the pretext of repairing the damage done to his neighbour's dress he carried her out of the room."

Thus, while he was writing to his wife in distant Paris, "I kiss you on the lips ; I kiss you on the heart," Napoleon was finding solace in his exile in making love to "lips that were near."

The only obstacle now in his path of love was the unsuspecting lieutenant ; and it was no difficult matter to get rid of him. One day Foures was summoned before General Berthier, Chief of the Staff, to learn that he had been chosen for a responsible mission—to carry despatches to Paris—and that he must start on his journey within an hour. The lieutenant, overcome by the honour thus unexpectedly offered to him, stammered, "I must go and warn my wife—to pack up." "Your wife?" exclaimed Berthier ; "why, you must be crazy. For one thing, she would be horribly ill on a small vessel, badly victualled, and which may have to face some risks ; besides, it would never be allowed." And Foures sailed away to France, leaving a tearful, but secretly delighted, wife behind him.

But all was not to be smooth sailing for the lovers. Before the *Chasseur* had lost sight of land she was captured by an English cruiser, whose commander, to quote Madame d'Abrantes, "knew quite enough of the episode of the Commander-in-Chief and Madame Foures to feel overjoyed at being able to engineer such a striking effect in the little comedy which was being enacted. And so, with

the utmost courtesy, he landed the worthy lieutenant on Egyptian territory and wished him good luck."

When Foures arrived at Cairo he found to his dismay that his bird had flown and had found a new cage, close to the quarters of the Commander-in-Chief, where she was by no means pleased to see him, and where she had been spending the too brief period of his absence very agreeably. In vain he stormed and raged, wept and pleaded. She was much too happy to return to his arms—in fact, she demanded a divorce to escape from his violence and persecution ; and Napoleon saw that effect was speedily given to his lady's wishes. A divorce was granted in the presence of the commissary of the army, and the outraged husband was packed off again to France, this time with more success.

Then followed a few halcyon months for the pretty " Bellilote," the name by which she loved to be known. Surrounded by luxury, richly dressed, she played the " queen " to perfection, doing the honours of the palace to the few French ladies with the army and entertaining the generals at dinner-parties. She was to be seen everywhere, radiantly young and lovely and happy, with Napoleon by her side—walking on the public promenades, driving in an open carriage with a brilliant escort of cavalry, or riding an Arab horse in general's uniform, a

three-cornered hat on her head. Round her neck she wore a long chain, from which hung her lover's miniature, and everywhere the soldiers greeted her coming with cheers, and shouts of, "There's our Generaless!" So infatuated became Napoleon with his new plaything that he seriously contemplated marrying her, after procuring a divorce from Josephine, who, he learned, was finding similar solace for separation in Paris. And there is little doubt that the ex-milliner might have been wife of the Emperor-to-be, if she had only qualified for the honour by becoming the mother of his child. But Madame Foures' reign was destined to be short-lived, for when Napoleon returned to France, after the battle of Aboukir, he left her, weeping and disconsolate, behind, declaring that he could not take her with him for fear lest the English might capture him, and of the scandal that would result if she were found to be his companion. Thus for a time she was condemned to remain in Egypt, divorced from her husband, separated from her lover, and shunned by all who, in the days of her pride, had been her courtiers and flatterers. And when, at last, she was permitted to embark for France, she arrived too late. Napoleon was once more in the toils of Josephine; he was now, as First Consul, ruler of France, and he refused even to see the woman to whom but a few months earlier he had vowed undying affection.

To add to her troubles, the husband whom she had hoped never to see again made his appearance in Paris, and, declaring that the divorce was irregular, "beset her with the utmost urgency, begging, threatening, moving things high and low in his efforts to obtain her return to him." Bellilote's lot had indeed fallen in evil places. But although Napoleon refused to see her, he had by no means forgotten her, and was willing to extricate her from her difficulties. He gave her large sums of money, made her a grant of sixty thousand francs from the theatrical fund, and he bought for her a country house near Paris. To complete her emancipation he also found a husband for her in Monsieur Henri de Ranchoup, member of an old Auvergnat family, whom he appointed Vice-Consul at Gothenburg on his wedding day.

Madame de Ranchoup, however, declined to follow her new husband to Gothenburg. She preferred the seductions of Paris, where she soon became a *persona grata* in fashionable circles, amusing herself by painting and novel-writing, in both of which she exhibited more than ordinary skill.

In a letter published in a provincial French paper a few years ago we get an interesting glimpse of Madame at this period of her second marriage—"Madame Ranchoup lived at Craponne from August 1812 to March 1814. The name was

almost forgotten in the district when, in July 1812, Monsieur Barrès, Secretary-General to the Prefecture, wrote to M. Gallet, then a lawyer at Craponne, desiring him to receive Madame de Ranchoup, banished by imperial decree from Paris. A few days afterwards a young lady, very fashionably dressed, arrived with a servant. She announced herself as one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting, who had come to the country for her health. She received a number of newspapers, which she read seated in front of M. Gallet's house, or smoking at the open window, to the great amazement of the ladies of Craponne, with whom she was not chary of her sarcasms. She often went out accompanied by a dog with long silky hair, for which she had a great affection, generally taking him to church with her, to the great scandal of the devout. She left Craponne at the approach of the first invading army."

After five years of such mockery of wedded life, Madame de Ranchoup separated from her husband, and sailed for Brazil with Sieur Jean Auguste Bellard, a retired officer of Guards, taking with her a cargo of goods which she bartered in Brazil for rosewood and mahogany. Thus, combining love with commerce, the adventurous lady continued her journeys across the seas until 1837, when she finally settled in Paris.

Here she spent the remainder of her long and

romantic life, surrounded by her pet birds and monkeys, writing, painting, playing the harp, and renewing the friendships of her earlier days, until at last death claimed her one March day in 1860.

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